No. 1133
27 May –
9 June 2005
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PRIVATE EYE

PAXMAN JOINS BBC PICKET LINE

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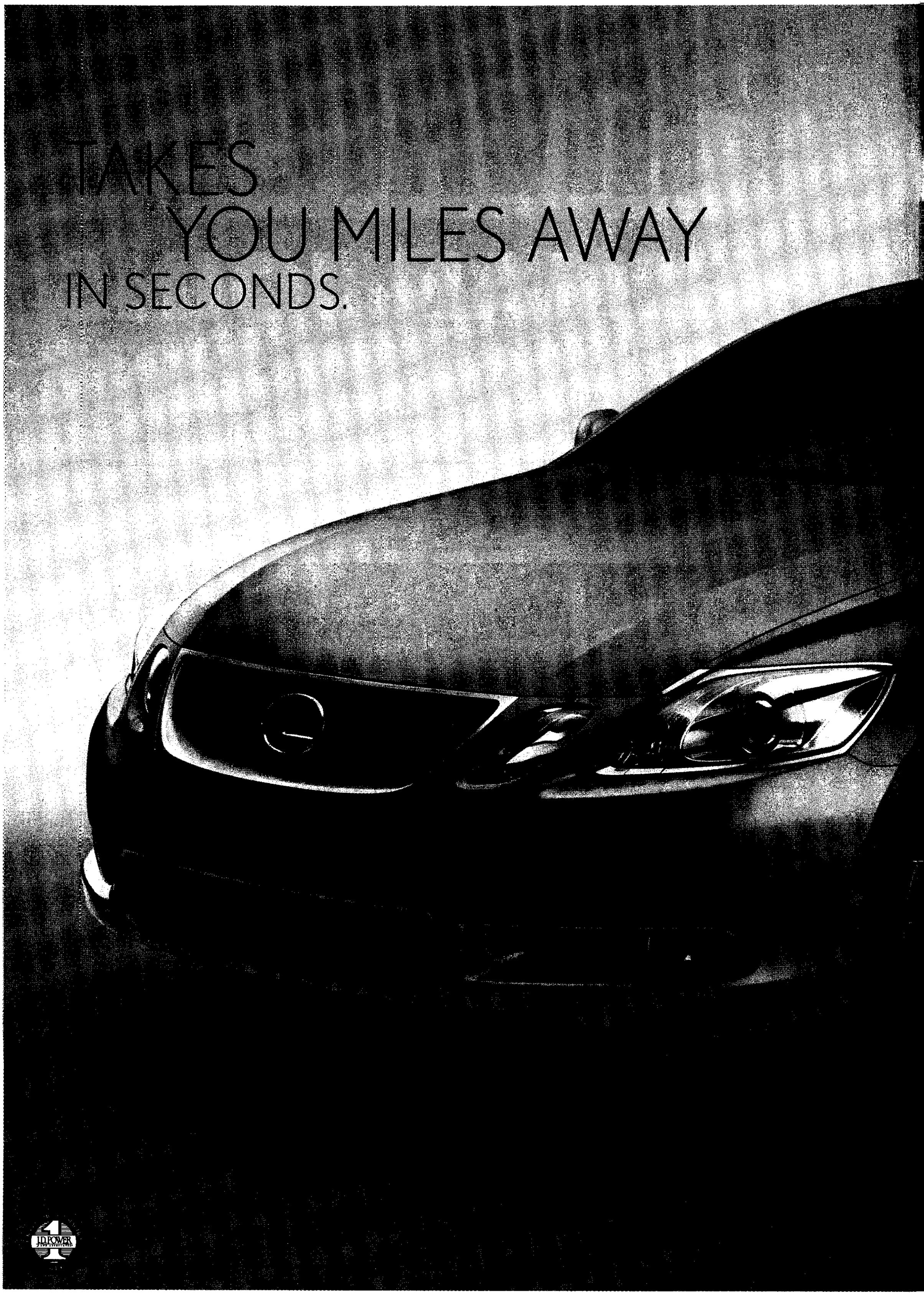

Model shown GS 430 with metallic paint. GS 430 £47,130 OTR. GS range prices start from £30,400 to £47,130 OTR. Prices correct at time of going to press and include VAT, delivery charges, number plates, full tank of fuel, one year's road fund licence and first registrat
J.D. Power and Associates 2001-2005 UK Customer Satisfaction Studies.℠ 2005 study based on a total of 23,322 responses from owners of two-year-old vehicles. www.jdpower.com

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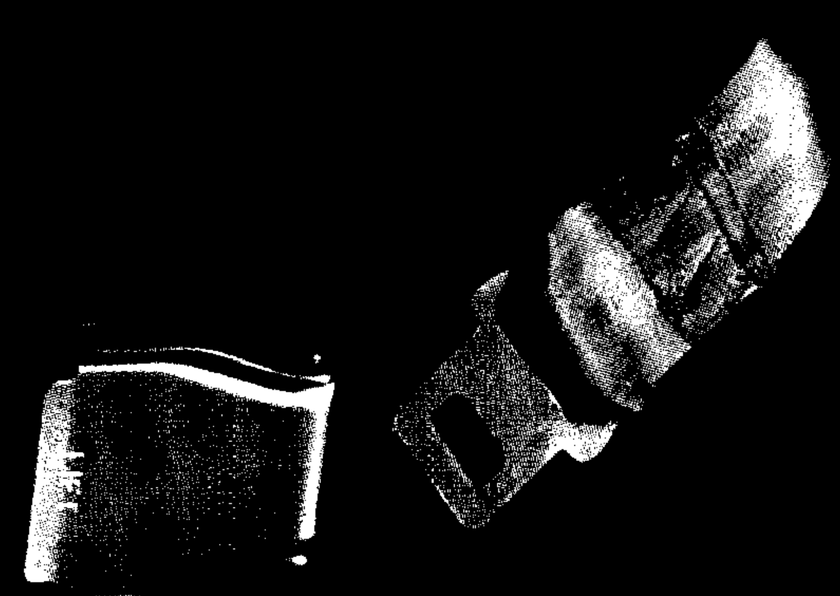

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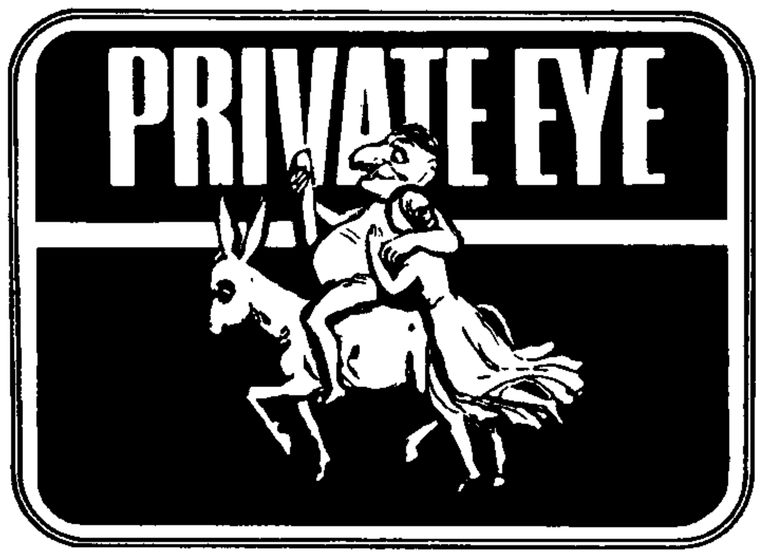

WHAT a shame BBC director-general Mark Thompson didn't follow the advice of his latest ridiculous consultation exercise, "The Big Think-In". Had he done a bit more thinkin', he might have avoided the strike by 11,000 journalists, producers and technicians.

Worryingly, Thompson – who once accused the corporation of "basking in a jacuzzi of spare public cash" – says the consultation will be "the most important thing the BBC will do in 2005".

Its "creative leader" will be Susan Spindler, who led the last consultation, "Making It Happen". This made almost nothing happen beyond the spending of large sums of licence-payers' money.

The new think-in will involve "genre teams" developing genre strategies that will go to a "creative board" in a two-stage timetable, made up of strategy and creative leaders and chaired by Thompson. It will have a website, "facilitators" and the same outside strategists and marketing types who trousered lashings of cash last time.

Its aim is to develop "a vision for the next five years". But programme makers who might have contributed to this "vision" are asking why the huge "think-in" wasn't initiated before Thompson decided to make thousands of them redundant, with no consultation of staff, governors or unions.

SO MUCH of the BBC has already been "outsourced" or privatised the current round of strikes by staff looks doomed to failure.

Only those strikers who are members of BECTU or the NUJ will have legal protection. Those working for Siemens who now own BBC Technology, McAlpines, Sodexo, Gardner Merchant or the pisspoor Land Securities Trillium will not be protected and have been warned by their bosses to work as usual.

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SOLUTION TO LAST ISSUE'S SUDOKU

EDITORIAL
6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. Tel: 020 7437 4017.
Fax: 020 7437 0705. Email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk
http://www.private-eye.co.uk

PRIVATE EYE SUBSCRIPTIONS/SALES
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Fax: 01795 414 555. Overseas: 01795 414 871
Books: 0870 750 1712 **Web:** www.private-eye.co.uk
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SUBSCRIPTION RATES
£21 per annum. Europe and Eire £29. Airmail (rest of world) £38. Cheques/POs to Private Eye. Mastercard/Visa.

ADVERTISING
Display: 020 7878 2303 Classified: 020 7240 9129

Published by Pressdram Ltd, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. **Printed** by BGP Ltd, Bicester OX6 7QZ. **Distributed** by P.E. Distributions, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. 020 7437 4017.

ABC

THE latest figures for government spending on consultants show another astronomical rise – up 46 percent to £1.9bn in 2004.

And the government department that has most dramatically increased its spending on consultants under "new" Labour? The treasury, which a recent parliamentary question from Lib Dem spokesman David Laws revealed now spends more than six times as much on consultants as it did before Gordon Brown arrived eight years ago.

THE McKinsey management consultancy is doing very nicely from "new" Labour.

Monitor, the pretentiously named regulator of NHS foundation trusts, spent £10m with McKinsey – more than half its £19.4m budget – in its first 15 months. As the *Health Service Journal* discovered, around £64,500 of this is going to Chelsea Clinton, the former US president's daughter who works for McKinsey in Monitor's London office.

McKinsey was picked without competition to help Monitor set up during its first three months, and was then reappointed after a competition. Coincidentally Monitor director Dr Penelope Dash has worked on health projects for McKinsey, although the regulator pointed out that she was appointed to the board after the firm won its contract at Monitor.

Meanwhile Tony Blair is also turning to McKinsey. His "blue sky" strategist, Lord Birt, is a paid adviser to the consultancy and Blair is now trying, on the Dalek's advice, to recruit David Bennett, a former McKinsey consultant, to run the Number 10 policy delivery unit. In 2003 Bennett worked as a McKinsey consultant for the department of health on the NHS's national IT project.

THE spirit of Sir Humphrey is alive and well in Whitehall, judging by a job advert taken out by the cabinet office in the *Financial Times* last week.

"Unnecessary bureaucracy is a burden, both on business and the public sector," it announced, pointing out that "the government is committed to a major reform programme – one of the most ambitious and far-reaching in the world."

And how does it plan to cut through these extraneous layers of bureaucracy? "Two new bodies are being set up to make this happen: a Better Regulation Executive to work at the centre of government in the Cabinet Office; and a Better Regulation Commission to take on the existing independent advisory and challenge the role played by the Better Regulation Task Force, providing external scrutiny of departmental progress…"

HOURS into his new job as shadow pensions secretary, returning Tory MP Malcolm Rifkind described Labour's performance on pensions as "the single greatest failure of the government. We started off with a very strong pensions industry and now we have these massive difficulties that have to be addressed."

One of the "massive difficulties" of recent years has been the way people saving for retirement have frequently been ripped off. One very costly episode, stinging punters for about £600m, was the split capital trust scandal. The principal culprit in what regulators called "collusion on a very substantial scale" was Aberdeen Asset Management, one of whose directors for the last five years has been… Sir Malcolm Rifkind.

Among Rifkind's jobs at Aberdeen is to sit on the directors' remuneration committee. Despite several of Aberdeen's trusts going bust in the scandal and the firm having to pay around £50m to make good investors' losses, Sir Malcolm and colleagues last year saw fit to award the board (including themselves) handsome pay rises and increased pensions contributions. That's certainly one way to deal with "massive difficulties" facing pension savers!

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"I told them the results weren't going to be good – but they wouldn't believe me. Now I am being punished!"
– Alan Milburn, Labour's election campaign supreme, now spending more time with his family.

WHICH way will new trade secretary Alan Johnson jump over privatisation of the Royal Mail?

Johnson is reportedly sympathetic towards proposals from chairman Allan Leighton for part-privatisation of the state-owned company through the sale of shares to staff in what is presented benignly as a "John Lewis-style" scheme but which unions fear is the first step towards a complete sell-off. Any acceptance of the former Asda man's plans would, however, represent a big change of heart from Johnson, a former union leader.

As head of the communications workers union in the early 90s Johnson organised a successful campaign to defeat Tory trade secretary Michael Heseltine's plans to privatise the post office, and stuck firmly to his guns once he became an MP in 1997. Johnson the backbencher implored the government not to entertain *any* kind of share sale, in 1998 asking the then trade minister Ian McCartney: "Is my honourable friend aware of the deep disquiet felt on these benches and in other parts of the house about share sales, and our concern that we do not go down that railtrack? Will he confirm that there is no earthly reason why a publicly owned Post Office cannot compete successfully against European postal administrations that have enjoyed the same commercial and financial freedoms for many years?" (McCartney, incidentally, replied that "the government are totally committed to the Post Office remaining in the public sector.")

Leighton justifies part-privatisation as enabling Royal Mail to deal with competition in postal services, including the loss of its letters monopoly next year. Although his reasoning is flatly contradicted by the views expressed so forcibly in parliament by the man now responsible for the company's future, it seems a "new" Labour cabinet posting works wonders in helping a union leader come round to a businessman's way of thinking.

On other pages...

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"Caesar's got back problems"

NEWS

AS pensions – or the lack of them – rise up the political agenda, happier news emerges from Royal & Sun Alliance (RSA), the life insurance firm that has been fined more than £2m in the last three years for mis-selling endowment policies and failing to deal properly with dodgy private pension sales.

The company has delighted the city by doubling its profits to £160m in the first three months of this year, apparently vindicating its decision last year to off-load its closed funds to a new set-up called Resolution Life, disposing in the process of many of the endowment and pension policies it mis-sold in the 1980s and 90s (see *Eye* 1133).

Of course none of the extra profits will find their way to the out-of-pocket policyholders already farmed out to Resolution, who might be forgiven for thinking RSA has left them high and dry. Perhaps fearful of such disgruntlement, Resolution simultaneously announced an initiative to ensure that policyholders have "an active environment rather than being treated as orphans".

The main elements of this "active environment" are a call centre, the inevitable re-branding of the funds, which are now called – wait for it – Phoenix, and a deal for policyholders to get financial advice from a company called Origen. All this will be controlled by a "customer strategy director" called Adam Walton, whose career includes running the sales operations at Axa Sun Life and Natwest Life, both notorious mis-sellers.

Meanwhile Resolution, barely six months after being set up, has already sold £2bn of annuity policies to Canada Life, another old pensions mis-seller.

Last year Resolution memorably explained to a parliamentary committee on the savings business that arrangements of this sort enable life insurance companies to "simplify their business and liberate their brand from any continuing negative perceptions surrounding an historic part of their activities". How liberated RSA must feel, while the mugs who bought their policies are passed from one mis-seller to another.

"...and this is the day room. Of course, everyone's out at work at the moment..."

Street Of Shame

"HUTTON REPORT LEAKED. It was the call every journalist in Westminster was waiting for – and Britain's top political editor Trevor Kavanagh got it."

Thus the famous *Sun* scoop which won Kavanagh the Reporter of the Year title at this year's British Press Awards. It was also named Front Page of the Year.

The front page in question showed Kavanagh with a phone pressed to his ear, listening as a "mole" gave details of Lord Hutton's findings. Initially, rival newspapers speculated that Alastair Campbell was the source. More recently, there have been suggestions that the story wasn't Kavanagh's at all but was brought in by another hack, Nick Parker. The *Sun* has been able to deny both theories because they are untrue.

The person who got the story was in fact *Sun* reporter Clodagh Hartley. It was a "ring in": she happened to answer the phone when a punter who was involved in printing the report called the newsdesk. She duly went to see the caller, who had a copy of the document, but was then told by her bosses to read its conclusions over the phone to Kavanagh, as they felt his name would give the scoop greater credibility. Kavanagh collected a British Press Award; Hartley's only reward was no longer having to work night shifts.

"BAD news for *New Statesman* editor Peter Wilby: the mag's political pundit John Kampfner is after his job," we reported as long ago as April 2004 (*Eye* 1103). After more than a year of tireless plotting, Kampfner finally persuaded owner Geoffrey "Paymaster" Robinson to grant his wish by sacking Wilby.

Internecine warfare has now broken out at the *Staggers*, led by contributing editor Frances Stonor Saunders who fired off a stern letter to Robinson deploring his treatment of Wilby. Fearful of a mass exodus, Kampfner has been frantically phoning round contributors begging them to "stay onside" with the new regime.

But how will the *Stoadsperson* stay onside with a new regime in Downing Street? Although Robinson has been happy for the mag to savage the Vicar, he will expect non-stop cheerleading once his mate Gordon Brown becomes leader. Yet Kampfner, for all his vanity and absurdity, is no one's patsy – and may thus meet the same fate as Wilby in a year or two.

Robinson's problem then will be to find an editor guaranteed never to utter even the mildest criticism of Gordon. Step forward... Charlie Whelan?

WRITING in last Saturday's *Daily Mail*, sacked *Mirror* editor Piers Morgan stuck to what he knew best – revealing all about "shallow, greedy talentless hypocrites who will whore themselves for fame".

For once, however, Moron chose not to write about himself but the cast of ITV's *Celebrity Love Island*, which he called "the most absurd and pathetic televisual experience I have ever had to endure...

"The ratings have continued to slide all week – hopefully the first clear sign that a backlash against reality TV, and the non-celebrity celebrities it spawns, may have finally started," wrote Moron of ITV's white elephant. It is, however, worth remembering that even at its lowest point so far, *Celebrity Love Island* has picked up nearly seven times as many viewers as that other exercise in TV pathos, Channel 4's *Morgan and Platell.*

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Attention is drawn to that great British man of letters Christopher Hitchens... Hitchens's invective, at once forensic and brimming with righteous indignation, marks him as the greatest polemicist of our age." – George Galloway, *Morning Star*, 17 August 2001.

"A drink-sodden ex-Trotskyist popinjay and useful idiot." – George Galloway on Christopher Hitchens, 17 May 2005.

IN A long feature for the *FT* magazine, Simon Kuper interviews up-and-coming Tory policy wonk Nicholas Boles. After mentioning that Boles spent some time at Harvard on a Kennedy scholarship, however, Kuper becomes hopelessly distracted.

"The role of the Kennedy scholarship in modern British politics is seldom noted," he muses. To make amends, he sings the praises of Kennedy scholars who were "chosen for their interest in public service" and have now "seized the commanding heights", including such illustrious figures as, er, William Waldegrave, David Curry and Chris Smith.

The *FT* hack is too modest to mention another former Kennedy scholar (from 1993-4) who has gone on to the commanding heights – Simon Kuper.

WHILE the *Telegraph* group is happy to pay Jamie Oliver's wife £40,000 to serialise her feeble memoirs, it has just lost one of its hardest working employees in a dispute over £20.

Lucy Wolseley, the foreign desk manager of the *Sunday Telegraph*, put in countless extra hours to help free correspondent Toby Harnden and photographer Julian Simmonds from jail in Zimbabwe and asked the foreign editor, Topaz Amoore, for some overtime pay.

The hugely unpopular Amoore offered her £280. When Wolseley asked her if she could round it up to £300, Topaz threw a hissy fit and said no.

Wolseley promptly resigned.

WHO will succeed Andrew Marr as the BBC's political editor? Writing in the *New Statesman*, Amanda "Gissa Job" Platell modestly refrains from proposing herself but suggests, rather implausibly, that it could be Jackie Ashley of the *Guardian*.

"Elegant, considered, clever," she gushes, "and as she is also Mrs Marr her appointment would keep the job in the family."

Amanda Platell has been a regular choice to review the Sunday papers on *Breakfast with Frost*. No doubt when Andrew Marr takes over from Sir David he will not be swayed in any way by Amanda's handsome tribute to his wife.

IN AN ecstatic review of the Marco-Pierre White restaurant Drones for *ES* magazine, Toby Young emphasises the class of the place by listing celebrities who eat there.

First up is Michael Caine. This seems unlikely, as Caine and White had a spectacular bust-up in the 1990s over an eaterie they ran together in Chelsea, and have not exactly been the best of friends ever since. An even more surprising name among the regular clients is that of Bob Monkhouse – still often to be found dining at Drones, apparently, despite the fact that he died in 2003.

A NEW threat to peace in the Middle East has arrived in the form of Anil Bhoyrul, who was one of the *Daily Mirror*'s City Slickers during the calamitous reign of Piers "Morgan" Moron.

Bhoyrul is now editor of *Arabian Business* magazine at ITP publishing in Dubai, where he is revered as the golden boy of the company – a fact that seems to have gone to his head, if his recent conduct at a local nightclub is anything to go by.

Bhoyrul's drunken and obnoxious antics (for which he is renowned among colleagues) resulted in his being punched by a bouncer, whereupon he threw a tantrum of "do you know who I am?" proportions. He's now threatening to print pictures of the offending bouncer with "unflattering comments" in every issue of his rag until the nightclub offers him financial compensation.

Perhaps Bhoyrul needs the money for his fighting fund: at some time within the next year he and fellow-Slicker James Hipwell will go on trial at Southwark crown court on charges of conspiring to contravene the financial services act.

Kylieballs

"Over the longer term, in my experience, breast cancer can also serve as a wake-up call that something is not working properly in your life… Perhaps, Kylie, you have been neglecting to listen to your true feelings?… Enjoy the new perspective on life that cancer has given you." – **Tania Yelland, *Daily Mail*.**

"There are no obituaries to be written today, other than for the myth that mere celebrity itself inoculates against life's quotidian dramas. Minogue's celebrated bottom may be just as pert as it was yesterday, but she is no longer an object of envy. It seems an anathema that a global brand such as Minogue might lose all her hair during a course of chemotherapy. But though she has rendered her body perfect for public consumption, that same body has not granted her immunity. It may sound strange, but the diagnosis is also a jolting reminder that Minogue is as much blood and bone as the rest of us. She never seemed to have so mundane a component as cells… But now the plastic has deferred to the corporeal." – **Libby Brooks, *Guardian*.**

"For 20 years, Kylie Minogue has straddled the pop firmament, playing the sex kitten you could happily take home to mum… She's the last person you'd expect to get cancer." – **Jessica Callan, *Daily Mirror*.**

"A close relative in Paris said Kylie's actor partner wept floods when she told him the news… The relative said: 'He had absolutely no idea she might be unwell. Olivier has dated some of the most beautiful women in the world, and never dreamed anything like this could happen. However, he comes from a strong, loyal family which battles against everything. His father and uncles were all boxers.'" – ***Daily Mirror*.**

"Tory election guru Lynton Crosby says the party must take lessons from Kylie Minogue if it is to recover from its third election defeat. He believes the singer – who is in hospital with breast cancer – is the perfect example for the Conservatives. Mr Crosby said: 'She's not a quitter and she never whinges. She's a good operator and she works bloody hard.' – ***Evening Standard*.**

"It's now time to leave Kylie alone… The last thing she needs now is the full glare of the media spotlight." – ***Daily Star* editorial, opposite yet another full-page article about her surgery.**

Number crunching

140 ■ Number of articles about Kylie Minogue in British newspapers in the week she revealed she had breast cancer

120 ■ Number of articles about Abi Titmuss in British newspapers in the week she revealed she had breasts

Mr Hain insisted all criminal and paramilitary activity needed to end in Northern Ireland if it was to continue to make political progress.

"I think we have a window of opportunity which we must open and walk through as soon as we can," he said.

Belfast News Letter

WHY OH Y-FRONTS?

ACCORDING to rumours swirling round Wapping, the Dirty Digger feels Rebekah Wade may have delighted us enough.

It wasn't so much the photos of Saddam in his smalls – though if they provoke violent anti-American reprisals, Rupert Murdoch will certainly be displeased and use them as an excuse to dump her. But apparently he has been looking for such an excuse anyway.

Rebekah did have some political usefulness because of her closeness to the Blairs, but this will come to an end when the Vicar retires. After that, if there's the slightest sign of a revival in Tory fortunes, Rupe will move the *Sun* back towards the Conservatives.

So who could replace her? A lively extrovert, a boisterous right-winger, someone with a talent for getting the paper noticed – it sounds eerily like a description of Kelvin MacKenzie. By a strange coincidence, MacKenzie is suddenly unemployed following the sale of his Wireless Group to Ulster TV. No, surely not…

SINCE Wade is too cowardly ever to defend her newspaper (or her cock-ups) in public, the task falls to managing editor Graham Dudman. He did all the TV interviews last week justifying the rag's decision to print the Saddam pictures. He did so claiming the pictures had been "handed over by US military sources in the hope of dealing a body blow to the resistance in Iraq".

A source – possibly confused about the number of copies of the *Sun* which appear on newsstands in Baghdad and Kirkuk – apparently told the paper that "it's important that the people of Iraq see him like that to destroy the myth. Maybe that will kill a bit of the passion in the fanatics who still follow him."

The following day, with the US military promising to "aggressively investigate" the provenance of the photographs on the grounds that they might breach the Geneva Convention (something the *Sun* curiously could not find room to report), the paper stuck to this line: "After appearing in the *Sun* they were shown around the world on TV and in newspapers. In Baghdad, Iraqis gathered in coffee shops to laugh out loud as our front page picture of their ex-president in his Y-fronts was screened by Arab networks."

What networks these might be, the paper did not say. Al-Jazeera, the most influential in the region, refused to show the pictures for "professional and moral reasons", running instead an interview with a lawyer who cited them as further proof that in America and Britain "it has become common to underrate the Arabs and violate their rights, feelings and dignity".

EVERY cloud has a silver lining of course and Graham Dudman has hugely enjoyed his media appearances. As his confidence grows, can he be persuaded to demonstrate his unusual party trick in public?

Known as "nasal flossing", the *Sun*'s managing editor is blessed with the ability to snort a condom up his nose and then eject it from his gob. Just the thing to do in front of Kirsty Wark the next time he's interviewed on *Newsnight*…

THE hapless Dudman is just the latest News International suit to take the flak in public for Wade's total lack of judgement.

Readers with a full set of the *News of the World*'s cut-out-and-keep paedophile pictures published in the summer of 2000 will recall the valiant efforts of that paper's managing editor Stuart Kuttner in the same role. But why is the flame-haired editrix so unwilling to speak up herself on behalf of such brilliantly thought-out scoops?

Perhaps it's because on the only occasion she has been allowed out in public, at a Commons select committee meeting in March 2003, she blithely told MPs that "we have paid the police for information in the past". This was followed by a hasty ring-round of reporters by the head of corporate affairs at News International to "clarify" that their editors did *not* slip bungs to coppers.

MORE on Simon Greenberg, the former *Evening Standard* and *News of the Screws* sports editor who is now spin doctor for Chelsea FC.

Colleagues who remember Greenberg as a reporter on the *Mail on Sunday* in the mid-90s are chuckling to themselves over his recent outburst against hacks who dared question his version of the brouhaha involving Jose Mourinho and the Swedish referee Anders Frisk. These hacks, he thundered, "can't seem to separate the reality from the facts" (*sic*).

He should know. Back in 1996 Greenberg filed a story from the Olympics in Atlanta where, he ludicrously claimed, the IRA was targeting the British athletics team base. This was soon picked up by editors back in London who passed on a bollocking to their own correspondents in Atlanta for missing this sensational news.

The harassed sports hacks were then prompted to deliver a bollocking of their own to Greenberg: if you're going to make up stories, they warned, then don't do it in such a way that the rest of us have to follow it up.

"APPALLING, pathetic, utterly predictable," Ian Botham thundered in the *Daily Mirror* last week. "England's omission of Kevin Pietersen from their first Test squad of a huge summer is a terrible blunder."

What he omitted to mention in this full-page rant is that Kevin Pietersen is represented by Mission Sports Management, a firm run by one I.T. Botham. Do the words "appalling", "pathetic" and "utterly predictable" spring to mind?

Christopher Robin Hoodie

"Let's go and hang about on the footbridge"

AN EARLY shot in Gordon Brown's leadership campaign has been fired by his former bag-carrier Neal Lawson, who writes in the *Grauniad* that if Tony Blair were truly listening "he would know that the electorate and the Labour Party want Gordon Brown to have his job. Gordon is a Labour giant."

But Lawson sounds a cautionary note: the Brown we want is "Gordon the social democrat", not "Gordon the flexible marketeer". He must promote "a care ethic, not just a work ethic… The business lobby must be confronted, along with our consumption addiction… Gordon needs to be clear about protecting the public sector from market forces".

Lawson knows a thing or two about the business lobby. After his stint with Brown, in 1997 he launched the lobbying firm LLM, which lured clients who wanted access to Labour by claiming to be "in-touch and in-tune with the new government". During the *Observer*'s Lobbygate investigations in 1998, Lawson boasted to the paper's undercover reporter (who was posing as a businessman) that he could "reach anyone. We can go to Gordon Brown if we have to".

The business lobby duly came flocking. In July 1998 LLM saved Tesco £40m by persuading ministers to abandon plans for a supermarket car-park tax. This sits a little oddly with his insistence now that our "consumption addiction" must be challenged because "on the environment it is impossible to triangulate away global warming and economic growth".

Another surprise is his assertion in the *Grauniad* that although flexible markets are essential in a global economy "it should be the flexibility of the employee for rewarding work that takes precedent over the right of companies to hire and fire, otherwise we breed insecurity". Can this by any chance be the same Lawson whose company incurred the wrath of trade unions a few years ago by advising Rupert Murdoch's News International on how to undermine the Labour government's fairness at work proposals?

EXPERTS are queuing up to advise Gordon Brown on dealing with the fiscal challenges facing the government in its third term.

From the right, in an article for the *Financial Times* by Sir Christopher Gent of free-market think tank Reform, comes an impassioned call for tax cuts, especially for the 20 percent lowest earners whose "effective tax burden of 39 percent leaves little room for anything beyond essential day-to-day spending".

One reason the tax burden for the poorest remains stubbornly high is rampant tax avoidance by the largest multinationals of the sort practised by Vodafone when Sir Christopher was chief executive.

Earlier this year, in a ceremony timed to coincide with the World Economic Forum in Davos, Vodafone was nominated for a "corporate social irresponsibility" award for a prodigious scheme to dodge German and British tax by using a Luxembourg holding company to acquire telecoms company Mannesman in 2000. Gent pocketed a handy £10m bonus for pulling off the deal, on which he is now naturally keen to see his own tax bill cut.

For some reason his tax reform agenda didn't include clamping down on multi-million pound avoidance scams.

SIR Ronald Cohen's £250,000 donation to the Labour party at the end of April was very timely.

Not only does it give a welcome boost to funds depleted by an expensive election campaign: it reminds Gordon Brown who his friends are as he contemplates a tax clampdown on the private equity firms that Sir Ronnie represents as chairman of Apax Capital Partners and the British Venture Capital Association (BVCA), the industry lobbying body.

Shortly before his budget in March, the chancellor announced that he would close a loophole that allows private equity backers to strip profits out of the British companies they own while incurring only minimal UK tax, with the cash often finding its way to the various tax havens in which many investors are based.

Legislation duly appeared in the finance bill a couple of weeks later, prompting the BVCA to accuse the government of "an attack on an industry that makes a major contribution to the UK economy and is a great British success story". Accountants employed by the private equity groups estimated that, far from the £20m or so tax Gordon expected to raise from the move, it would cost the industry around £500m each year.

In the face of this growing furore, when a shortened finance bill was published and rushed through parliament as the election was called, the clampdown on the private equity scam (unlike some other tax avoidance measures) had been dropped. Ministers insist that all the clauses that didn't make it from the original bill will be introduced in the new parliamentary session…

Fire alarm help for dead people

DEAF and hard of hearing people across Notts will be safer in their homes thanks to special smoke detectors provided free.

Worksop Guardian

"NEW" Labour panjandrums are demanding heads in the turbulent "old" Labour heartland of Blaenau Gwent, which at the general election sent the parachuted Blairite candidate packing and voted instead for independent leftie Peter Law with a 9,000 majority.

Rebel Labour party members who signed Law's nomination papers or appeared in his election material are to be expelled from the party – including local grandee Rex Herbert, a councillor for 52 years and a freeman of Ebbw Vale.

Herbert had his expulsion order read out to him by a clearly vexed Chris Roberts, Labour's Wales regional director. Roberts had gate-crashed a local branch meeting to make his displeasure known to Herbert and other truculent comrades who had supported for Law. Having done so, he breezily announced that the meeting "is now over". "It won't be until the door is locked," retorted one of the rebels. "And I've got the key!"

PETER HAIN has rapidly changed his mind on the value of having more than one job.

The week before the general election he warned voters in Blaenau Gwent not to support Labour rebel Peter Law, who was standing as an independent against the official Blairite candidate Maggie Jones, or they would get a "part-time MP" as Law was already a member of the Welsh Assembly.

Ignoring the fact that even then he was both Welsh secretary and leader of the House, Hain blustered to the *Western Mail* on 30 April: "The people of Blaenau Gwent deserve a full-time Member of Parliament, not someone who wants to divide their time between Cardiff Bay and Westminster."

The voters ignored Vain and Law was duly elected. When the new government posts were then divvied up on 9 May, Hain found himself with *three* jobs: Northern Ireland secretary; Welsh secretary – as well as MP for Neath.

TORY MP David Amess, who represents Southend West, dedicated his election victory to his 20-year-old son, David junior. "My one regret is that my son is not able to be beside me tonight," he declared.

Young Amess was absent because he is serving a prison sentence for grievous bodily harm. He was jailed two months ago after viciously attacking a man in a Southend nightclub, beating him over the head with an empty champagne bottle and leaving him with a four-inch gash to the head.

"I will fight for justice," the MP vowed on election night, speaking of his son. "Since 1997 this has become an unjust country in which to live and the people will deliver a verdict of rejection on this government."

No doubt the Labour government has much to answer for, but why it deserves the blame for his son's thuggery was not explained.

As Amess's own party leader Michael Howard said in the Queen's Speech debate last week: "It is time to restore respect in society, tackle yob culture head-on… and make the punishment fit the crime." Locking up yobs who smash bottles in people's faces would seem consistent with this Tory approach – unless, of course, the yob's father happens to be a Tory MP.

NADINE DORRIES, the new Conservative MP for Mid Bedfordshire, was parachuted into the constituency at the last minute by Conservative central office following the sudden resignation (or rather sacking) of the sitting MP Jonathan Sayeed, who was caught taking money for showing American "guests" around the Houses of Parliament.

This turns out to be the same Nadine – then named Nadine Bargery – who was parachuted into the Hazel Grove constituency at the 2001 election and lost heavily to the Lib Dems. Her imposition aroused fury among local Tories, who wanted to choose their own candidate.

Why is she always first choice for the parachute jump when Tory HQ in London decides to despatch its own candidate?

JUST FANCY THAT

ON 9 MAY Sir Digby Jones, director-general of the CBI, was keynote speaker at a conference on "the Opportunities of a Low Carbon Economy" near Blackpool.

He spoke at length on how business could "maximise the benefits of mitigating climate change". He then used a helicopter to travel to a number of other local engagements, finishing up at Blackpool international airport where he gave another speech in which he "encouraged national and international business leaders to join the growing trend of flying into Blackpool in private jets to do business in the town and its environs". He then boarded his own private Lear jet and travelled back to London.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THE European ombudsman has accused Olaf, the EU anti-fraud office, of telling lies in the case of Hans-Martin Tillack, the German investigative journalist whose work files were seized in a police raid in Brussels last March (see *Eyes passim*).

The ombudsman's report concludes that "Olaf should acknowledge that it made incorrect and misleading statements" in its submissions.

Olaf claimed it had reliable information that Tillack had paid for inside information from Olaf officials. Tillack has always denied this and pointed out that there has never been any evidence to support the accusation. The ombudsman seems to agree with him. It found it "difficult to understand" why the anti-fraud office had referred to "information from reliable sources, including members of the European parliament" when any alleged statements "constituted only hearsay evidence".

Though the ombudsman's report is the first bit of good luck Tillack has had while being persecuted by the European authorities, it remains to be seen how the parliament responds to it. It's possible the report will now just gather dust for a year with the parliament's petitions committee before MEPs get the chance to say what they think of it. In EU scandals generally, political parties have tended to guide their MEPs to tolerate apparent misdemeanours, presumably to fend off criticism of the loathed Brussels bureaucracy by the people who pay for it.

WHY is European taxpayers' money being lent to a US food giant to drive EU farmers out of business, pollute the environment and sell allegedly mouldy sausages to European consumers?

The Polish public prosecutor opened an investigation into Constar, part of the Animex Group owned by Smithfield Foods, this month, after Polish TV station TVN filmed meat plant workers apparently removing mould from sausages and changing expiry dates. All Constar produce has been withdrawn from Polish shops and the director of Constar has been sacked.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) loaned Animex £19m in 2001 for "modernisation". The EBRD is owned by 58 countries, including the UK which has an 8.5 percent share, representing a capital subscription of £1.2bn. It provides loans, equity investments and guarantees for big infrastructure projects in the former communist states.

A recent profile in the *FT* described Animex's pig farming in eastern Europe as an Iowa-style "highly industrialised meat production system". Green campaigners point out that aside from the poor conditions for the pigs, this means manure from industrial sties – containing salmonella, E. coli and listeria – is poured on to local fields and runs off into streams. Hardly the high standards of "environmental sensitivity" the EBRD claims to promote.

Smithfield's rapid expansion also pushed down the price of pork, sending traditional farmers into a crisis that meant the Polish government had to spend a fortune making an "intervening purchase" of meat – although overproduction is still a problem and impacts on pork prices across the EU.

Smithfield is currently embarking on an expansion into Romania. Polish campaigners are recommending that the EBRD should not help them spread their methods any further.

ON 25 APRIL European Union (EU) foreign ministers met in Luxembourg and quietly agreed to extend existing sanctions against Burma for another year. No press release was issued and no statement was put on the commission website.

Was this because they had failed to deliver on their promise to tighten sanctions if there was no progress towards democracy in Burma and hoped no one would notice? Yes indeed: but the ministers have plenty of other reasons for not drawing attention to the EU's position on Burma, which is increasingly embarrassing.

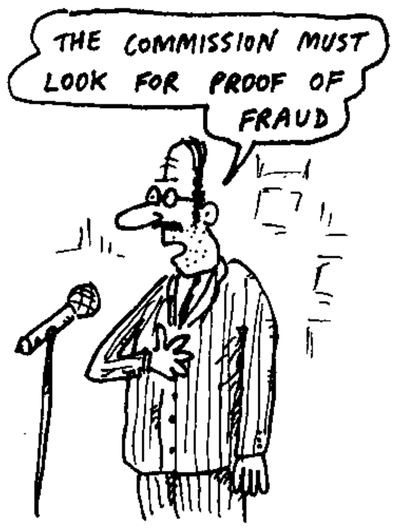
Last October the EU was forced to water down proposed investment sanctions because France was concerned they could have an adverse effect on its oil giant Total. Instead of banning investment in Burma's oil, gas and timber industries, where the regime earns the bulk of its income, they placed a ban on investing in a few state-owned companies such as a pineapple juice factory and a tailor's shop. Only after this puny ban was introduced did the EU realise that foreign investment in state-owned companies was already banned under Burmese law.

Meanwhile the US government, which banned investment in Burma in 1997, much to the chagrin of its own oil companies, looks on in disbelief as all 25 EU members have their foreign policy dictated according to the interests of a single French oil company.

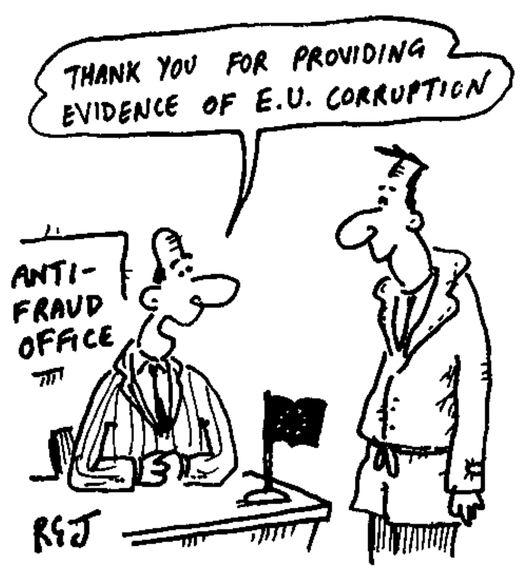
THE European Union special programme for peace and reconciliation in North Ireland has handed over £900,000 to help with the production of, er, missiles.

French arms firm Thales Air Defence bid for the "peace money" to help develop a new missile system at its site in Castlereagh, Northern Ireland. The government argues that subsidising this effort will boost the Ulster economy and assist in consolidating the peace process – at least in Northern Ireland.

EU-phemisms



Because anyone else might actually find it



We've destroyed it. Go away

EXAM FAILURE

IT'S exam time again and chaos and confusion reign as usual at the Edexcel examination board. This time it's SATS and Edexcel's bungled attempts to recruit markers.

One Preston teacher and would-be marker, Tony Smith, was asked to send some pre-training papers to his allotted team leader ahead of a training meeting on 7 May but was given no address to send them to. Mr Smith rang Edexcel and was passed from one person to another before eventually being informed that the team leader he had been told he had was *not* his team leader. However, over the weekend that original team leader called, assured Mr Smith that he was on her team and gave him her address to send through his papers.

Mr Smith duly put them in the post, only to get a call the next day from Edexcel saying he *wasn't* on that team and please could he attend a different meeting. He said he could not make the new date, so Edexcel said someone would get back to him. No one did. Back in limbo, and after seeking advice from his original team leader, Mr Smith attended the original training class, completed all the post-training materials and sent them off to her. Three days later, and after he had spent hours on the phone trying to find someone at Edexcel who knew what was going, he was told that as far as the exam board was concerned, he had "withdrawn his application". Eventually Mr Smith managed to get hold of a SATS manager, who assured him someone would be in touch...

Mr Smith is not alone. Teachers' websites describe similar tales of woe and as one teacher writes: "If schools ran the testing process with as much disorganization as Edexcel seem to have done, we'd all be shot down in flames."

HIGH PRINCIPALS

GLASGOW University vice-chancellor Sir Muir Russell has asked his departments to start making "staff savings" in an effort to balance the books and avoid an estimated £7m loss this year. Around 250 jobs are likely to go, according to the Scottish press, just three years after 150 staff left under a voluntary scheme.

Losing money hand over fist should be a familiar scenario for Sir Muir. In his last job as permanent secretary of the Scottish Office, he oversaw the early days of the Holyrood Project to build the new Scottish parliament building, then estimated to cost £55m. After costs spiralled wildly out of control, eventually reaching £431m, Sir Muir claimed at the Fraser inquiry that everything had been shipshape before it was handed over to the Scottish parliament in 1999.

Lord Fraser disagreed, finding that the project was already "not in a viable and healthy condition" at handover. He also found that Sir Muir and fellow civil servants made a conscious decision to keep ministers in the dark about risks that could cause costs to escalate.

While the university feels the pinch, Sir Muir himself is still raking it in, with his £178,000 vice-chancellor's salary complementing his civil service retirement package (a lump sum of £215,000, plus an annual pension of around £75,000).

POVERTY UPDATE

AFRICA's anti-corruption bandwagon turned into a gravy train long ago; but the London-based Good Governance Group (G3), a lobby group bankrolled by oil and mining businesses, really takes the biscuit – or the roast English lamb anyway, following last week's terrifically important (and agreeable) lunch at Gordon Ramsay at Claridge's.

Half a dozen deeply concerned guests of G3's Andre Pienaar, including shadow Tory minister Keith Simpson, assembled to stuff their faces while listening to Oby Ezekwesili, Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo's economic adviser, talk gravely about ending poverty.

She explained the belated efforts of her former military ruler boss (himself the subject of impeachment proceedings for the second time in four years) apparently to end the scourge of poverty and to crack down on sleaze – or sleaze on the part of his political enemies, anyway.

"Transparency", alas, does not apply to G3's corporate backers who choose to remain anonymous, explained Mr Pienaar. And if some of the guests got carried away – Nigeria, a country with no budget six months into the year and in desperate poverty, despite raking in $100bn since its return to "democracy" in 1999, was a "role model" for Africa, said one – blame the Chateauneuf du Pape 2001. Isn't poverty grand?

ITV

Celebrity Love Island
(ITV1)

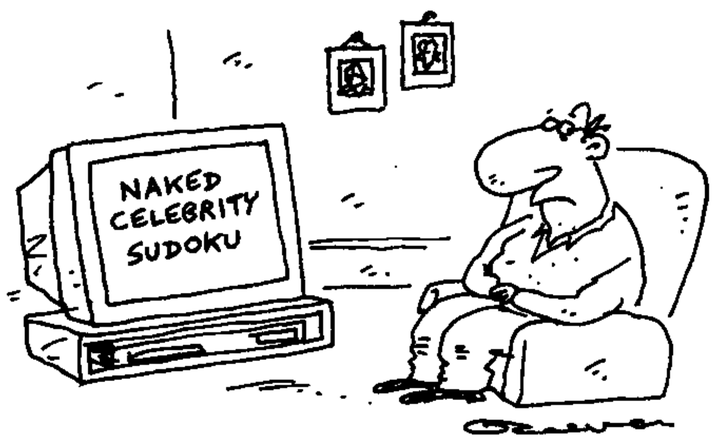
NEVER underestimate the men, women and hyper-intelligent alien lizards who now run ITV. Every time you think they have plumbed the depths, that there is no lower they can possibly go, they manage to dream up something new and even worse to strip across seven nights of precious prime time.

No doubt they are paid vast sums of money for this; but should their identities ever become public knowledge, their physical safety may be at risk. No one in the history of British television has shown such consistent and deep-seated contempt for their viewers. Sooner or later, you can't help feeling, it will be payback time.

Maybe it will be **Celebrity Love Island** that tips some nutter over the edge. "There's a fortune to be won," says the voice-over each night, as we watch clips of the participants jumping into swimming pools, "and only the perfect couple can claim the prize." What price perfection? Judging by some of the boob jobs on display, we can assume it's very expensive indeed.

As it is, each participant has already received a sizeable cheque merely for turning up and taking two weeks off whatever it is they do the rest of the time. (Let's not harp on about how debased the term "celebrity" has become. Let's just accept its new definition, to whit "unknown person who might once have slept with better known person".)

In the meantime cameras follow them everywhere, from sunlounger to swimming pool, from swimming pool back to sunlounger, and from sunlounger back to swimming pool again. Abi Titmuss adjusts her bikini. A man with huge muscles picks his nose. No one reads a book. Nothing happens, because there's nothing for them to do. Even connoisseurs of the



genre are aghast. You thought nothing ever happened in *Big Brother*? Here is a true existential void, broadcast unedited for hour after unspeakable hour throughout the night. It's the *Truman Show Goes On Holiday*.

On one level, though, boredom may be the intention. If the 12 "celebrities" find they have absolutely nothing at all to do, the hope is that they will do the only thing anyone really wants them to do: shag each other senseless. Cameramen, production team, executives, advertisers, tabloid hacks, seedy insomniacs slavering over Rebecca Loos's new porn breasts: everyone sits and waits for hot unbridled love action.

In order to help things along a bit, viewers voted Lady Isabella Hervey and someone called Paul into the "Love Shack", where every spring of every bed is no doubt wired for sound. Unfortunately they didn't get on: Paul was the world's stupidest man and Lady Isabella was shallower than the water on the beach. As Paul told the camera: "I ended up goin', look 'ere, babe, what's goin' on 'ere? Y'know? Are we, like, y'know, do you really not fancy me, like? 'Cos I'm really pullin' out all the stops 'ere. What a waste."

In other words he simply could not believe that she did not wish to have his children. You could see her point: his were not genes that were crying out to be reproduced. But his endless whingeing and whimpering took up far too much screen time, possibly because there was nothing else to show instead.

In the nightly packages Patrick Kielty and Kelly Brook try and do their Ant and Dec impersonation, only about 11 percent as well. Their knowing, charmless tone reflects the cynicism of the concept, of the execution and of everyone involved. It's like a big in-joke between broadcaster and viewer: we know it's crap, you know it's crap and so we can make it and you can watch it without guilt or shame because it's only telly and no one cares.

But is that all there is now? Are we truly brought so low? You don't have to be Lord Clark of Civilisation to believe that television, even ITV, might have slightly more to offer. Nonetheless, *Celebrity Love Island* represents something of a nadir, until it is superseded by whatever they are planning next.

'Couch Potato'

Number crunchings

1.5 ■ Million viewers shed by Celebrity Wrestling in the four weeks before it was taken off air

2 ■ Million viewers shed by Celebrity Love Island in its first four days on air

3 ■ Further programmes with the word "Celebrity" in the title which ITV has scheduled for this summer

I-SKY STAR WARS

■ "Pint-size *Star Wars* actor Kenny Baker revealed yesterday that the interior of R2D2 has been plastered with pictures – of Page 3 girls. Kenny – who has played the robot, below, in all the movies, including new one *Revenge Of The Sith* – was given the treat by film crew… He also reveals in Sky One documentary *Star Wars: Feel the Force* on May 18: "I wasn't excited about the job at first because I wanted to work at the Pontins summer season in Torquay."

– **The *Sun*** (prop: R. Murdoch) on a Sky One (prop: R. Murdoch) documentary about the *Star Wars* films, distributed by 20th Century Fox (prop: R. Murdoch), 2 May.

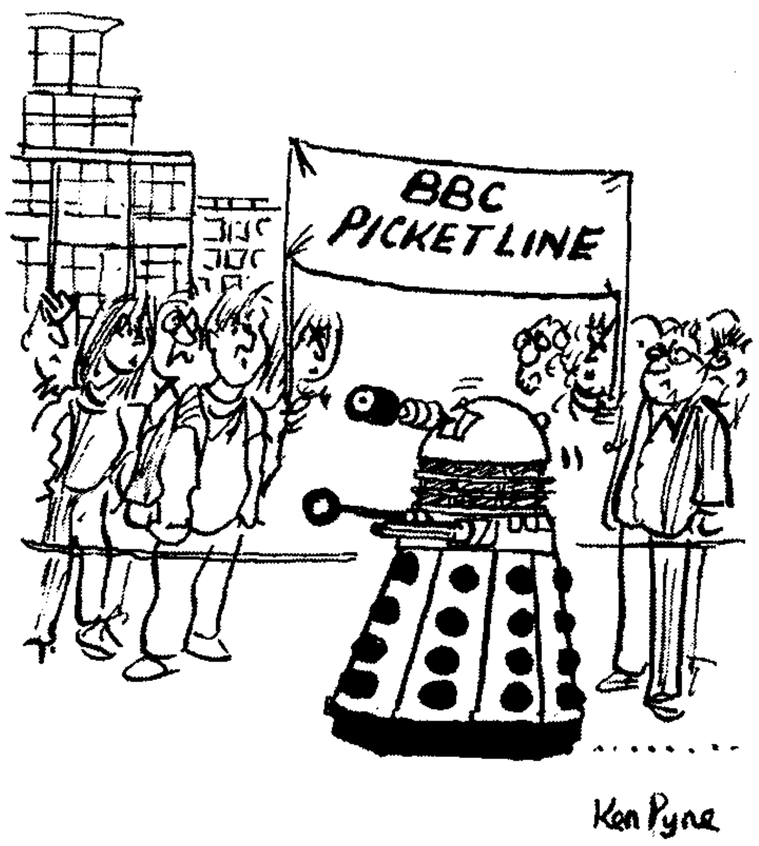
HUMBUG CORNER

"SO there IS a limit to how low viewers will allow TV to stoop," sighed the *Sun* on 19 May.

"The plunging ratings of *Celebrity Love Island* prove you do not want a constant diet of dumb drivel… As ITV celebrates its 50th anniversary, its founding father must be cringing at some of the programmes that now fill the air. **Where did it all go wrong?"**

Highbrow offerings in that day's *Sun* included a series of pictures of two glamour models fighting outside a nightclub and ending up with their breasts exposed; details of how Abi Titmuss "used sex toys in a lesbian romp after seducing a mystery girl"; a reminder of the paper's pre-election revelation that the prime minister has "a big willy"; and three full pages of coverage of… *Celebrity Love Island*.

But it remains to be seen if this week's launch of the new series of *Big Brother* will see editor Rebekah Wade repeat her 2003 offer of "£50,000 to the first *Big Brother* boy-girl bonk."



"I'm not a scab – I'm management"

DUMB BRITAIN

Rock FM, Preston

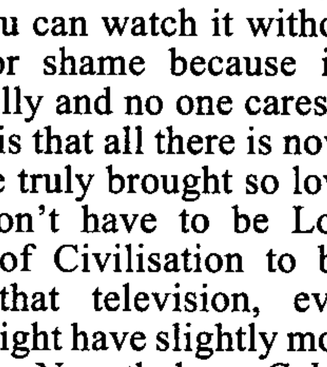
Presenter: Name a film starring Bob Hoskins that is also the name of a famous painting by Leonardo da Vinci?

Contestant: Who Framed Roger Rabbit.

Q103, Cambridge

Presenter: How many members were there of the boy band Five?

Contestant: Four.



Magic 1152, Manchester

Presenter: Who said "Kiss me Hardy"?

Contestant: Was it his girlfriend?

Presenter: No – it was a man who said it.

Contestant: Was it Stan Laurel?

LUVVIES

"I had to play one scene with Rommel where he was accusing Hitler over the concentration camps. I had to go completely bananas. Some people said it was overdone, but there's no doubt it was compelling...

"...In some ways, I could identify with Hitler. I had managed a company; he had managed an army. I tried to conquer the world with words; he used weapons. I had a short fuse when it came to critics just as he did. "

STEVEN BERKOFF
Grauniad

Submitted by Robin Moffatt.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

AD NAUSEAM

IN THE face of mounting concern over food companies selling stuff to children, the companies have responded by trying to sell children even more stuff.

Last week McDonald's began a global promotion giving away handheld videogames with Happy Meals. The games are based on the Crash Bandicoot and Spyro the Dragon characters, the creation of VU Games, whose marketing supremo Ed Zobrist admitted: "The videogames are very popular among kids."

However, as McDonald's announced in March, Happy Meals are now available with carrot sticks instead of fries so parents needn't worry. In the same month, McDonald's chief marketing officer Larry Light told a London audience that McDonald's intended to increase its marketing to children, on the delightfully skewed logic that "if we want to educate our children to eat right and be active, we need effective marketing communications".

Heinz, meanwhile, is rolling out a new range in the autumn called Planet Cook, which has been created for children and will contain less salt and sugar. All well and good – except that parents may also have seen a CBBC programme called... *Planet Cook* – yes, the range is in fact a tie-in. To what extent this might constitute product placement is a separate matter, but that such products will benefit from sharing the name of a popular children's programme is beyond dispute, and after the debacle of the Tweenies food tie-ins (*Eye* 1090), the BBC and Heinz should know better.

MAY has seen a new Keep Britain Tidy campaign, in an attempt by Encam, the charity behind it, to target 18-24 year olds for whom jettisoning a kebab wrapper on a pavement is the climax of a good night out.

A noble intent but one that has spawned some of the year's worst advertising so far, with three images of a horny hunk and buxom blondes asking "While you're down there..." (at which point the eye is drawn to the pay-off line, printed on their crotch) "could you put this in the bin for me?"

The sexpots are holding items of litter, it transpires. On a budget of £70,000 and with a small Manchester agency, Lake Design, on creative, some attention-seeking is perhaps understandable. But did it have to be quite so inane as to think that sex and refuse collection was a good fit? And for a campaign designed to stop litter, printing the same dross on thousands of beermats as well will surely only create more.

REMEMBER last month's election advertising? No, neither does anyone else.

The monthly Propellor Communications "Ads that make the news" survey has found that apart from the Tories accusing Tony Blair of being a liar – hardly an inspired turn – the best suggestions of Lord Saatchi and Trevor Beattie received less collective media attention than Michael Winner's new Esure commercial.

How Advertising Works

SONY PlayStation is to receive the advertiser of the year award at June's Cannes International Advertising Festival.

On hearing of the forthcoming award, Sony's computer entertainment CEO Ken Kutaragi said: "During the past 10 years, we have continued to create inspiring advertisements that communicate... the new experience and excitement of computer entertainment."

Whoops! The next day the ASA banned an ad for a PS2 game with the inspiring, exciting headline "What's it feel like to drill the head of the punk who stole your family from you?"

FILMWATCH

Paul Ross

SO FAREWELL then, Paul Ross, retiring as *News of the World* film critic after four years. His departure will be a disaster for film publicists, who could always rely on him to provide an enthusiastic quote they could splash over the posters for any turkey, no matter how bad it was...

PEARL HARBOUR (2001)

They Said: "A two-hour movie squeezed into three hours, its centerpiece is 40 minutes of redundant special effects, surrounded by a love story of stunning banality." – Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun-Times*

Ross Said: "It's fantastic – everything a big budget blockbuster should be and then some. More gripping than *Gladiator*, more tear-jerking than *Titanic* and, unlike a lot of recent Hollywood historical epics, honest and accurate. So this is the must-see movie of the summer. And what a movie!... It's the kind of film David Lean would have been proud of – an event movie you've simply got to see. It's sensational."

PLANET OF THE APES (2001)

They Said: "A dumbed-down, screeching, gibbering, banana-peeling, PG Tips-drinking festival of nonsense" – Peter Bradshaw, *Guardian.*

Ross Said: "An unmissable romp... 20th Century Fox must be chimping at the bit for a sequel. And so am I. Tim Roth deserves an Oscar for his performance as General Thade."

STAR WARS: ATTACK OF THE CLONES (2002)

They Said: "It's too long, it's too dull, it's too lame... Has Lucas lost the will to work with good, spontaneous, creative actors?" – Stephen Hunter, *Washington Post.*

Ross Said: "Start celebrating! This inter-galactic masterpiece boldly goes where no sci-fi film has gone before. Nothing – not the trailers, not the previous Star Wars movies, not even your own imagination in hyper-drive – can prepare you for the sheer scale of this superb spectacle. It also sees Ewan MacGregor claim the role of Obi-Wan Kenobi as his own... He is, and I never thought I'd write this sentence, even better than the late Sir Alec Guinness."

MATRIX: RELOADED (2003)

They Said: "The new movie is bloated and sprawling where its predecessor was sleek and lean." – Marc Caro, Chicago Tribune.

Ross Said: "The follow-up needed to be not just good but great – brilliant in fact. But it isn't... it is superb. Melon-twistingly mega magnificent. Astonishing. Just think of your own superlatives and double 'em. Triple them even because this is the greatest sequel of all time."

THE LAST SAMURAI (2004)

They Said: "*The Last Samurai* is tripe. The fact that it's reverential, stately tripe makes it all the more revolting, because it will fool some viewers that it has some merit." – Nicholas Barber, *Independent on Sunday*

Ross Said: "It's an epic. It's awesome. And it's a severe case of Samurai Knight Fever. This Far Eastern tale gives us the best Western since *Dances With Wolves* and perhaps the best historical movie since *Lawrence Of Arabia*. Yes, it's that good – dark, demanding, intense and intensely satisfying."

AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS (2004)

They Said: "Steve Coogan struggles to make you even smile in this clunking dud of an ill-advised remake." – Kevin O'Sullivan, *Daily Mirror.*

Ross Said: "This has everything you need for a fun afternoon at the movies. In fact, it's the best family action adventure film this year."

ALFIE (2004)

They Said: "As pointless as it is stylish, this breezy restrained remake of the 1966 Michael Caine hit begs not the question 'What's it all about?' but rather 'Why bother in the first place?'" – Glenn Whipp, *Los Angeles Daily News*

Ross Said: "With a career best from Jude Law and an embarrassment of belting birds, this plays a blinder in every position."

BE COOL (2005)

They Said: "A poorly written, directed and acted imitation of the first. Not funny, not clever and, crucially, not cool." – Olly Richards, *Empire*

Ross Said: "This movie doesn't just try to be cool – it is cool. And funny. And daft. And the best thing John Travolta's done for yonks... Big John's ace, and he's aided and abetted by the best supporting cast ever seen outside a Tarantino movie... This is a joy. See it."

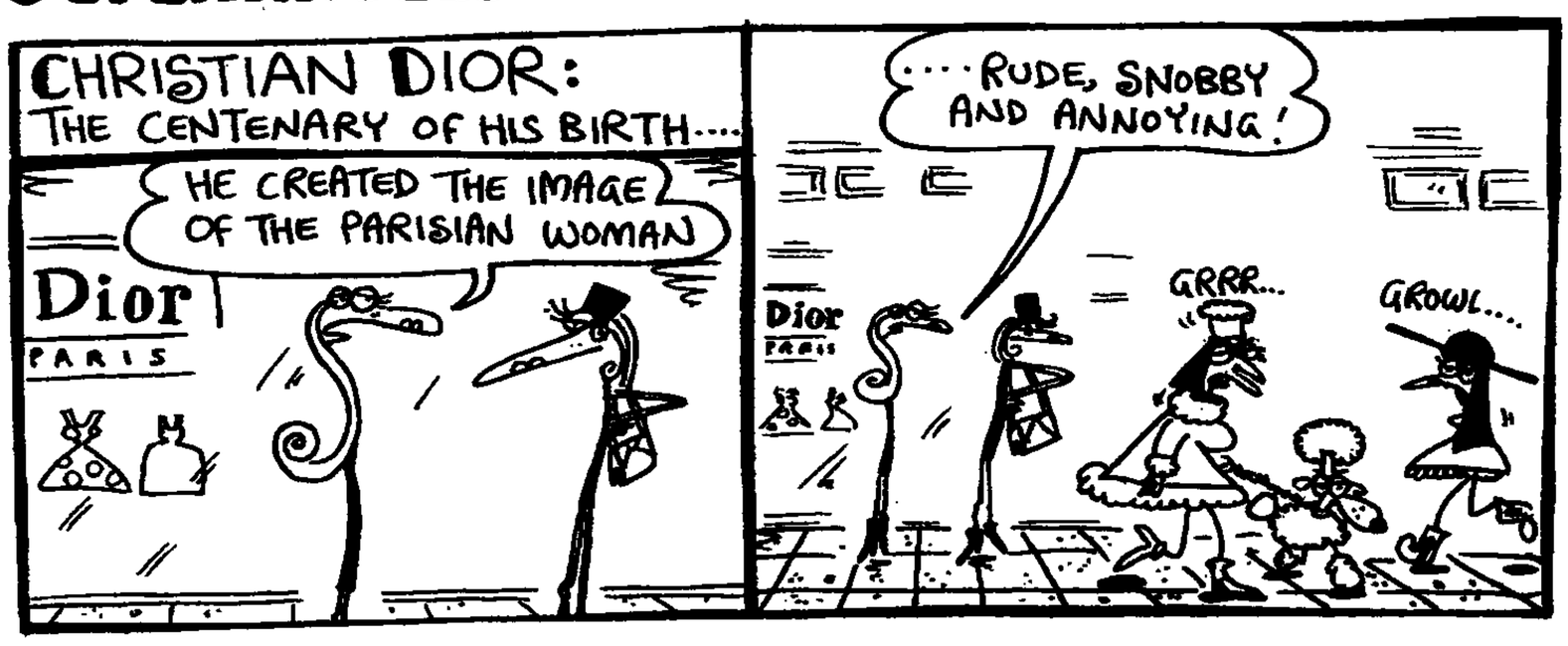
ALEXANDER (2005)

They Said: "An outright disaster: lumpen, pedantic, agonisingly long and awash with camp histrionics even when it isn't trying to be." – Tim Robey, *Daily Telegraph*

Ross Said: "Forget *Alexander the Great* – this is Alexander the Blindingly Brilliant. Director Oliver Stone has created an ancient epic to rival the mighty *Spartacus*. He's also pulled off the bloodiest, most exciting and convincing sword and sandal saga in cinematic history."

SUPERMODELS

KERBER



DOING THE ROUNDS

FAREWELL John "Oh Fuck not health" Reid, enter Patsy "I saved Rover and I'll save the NHS" Hewitt.

Aside from a better impression of empathy, little will change with a new health secretary. Both are Blairite ultra-loyalists who would eat their children if the great one asked them to. Hewitt claimed she would "listen to everyone" and then swiftly announced the transfer of £3bn out of the NHS into private "independent treatment centres" (ITCs) to perform 1.7m operations over five years.

This will undoubtedly get waiting lists down but at what cost? Private companies are currently offered guaranteed five-year contracts (whether they do the work or not), paid at 20-25 percent above what the NHS receives. In addition, ITCs are free to pick and choose the easy (profitable) cases and send anything complex, costly and potentially litigious back to the NHS. The playing field is so un-level, the NHS is in danger of sliding off it altogether.

The "new" Labour argument is that new entrants to the market have to be offered some guarantee of income and profit. Why? Many NHS hospitals have taken similar commercial risks in building their own treatment centres yet don't receive the same favourable terms as the private sector. In addition, the surgeons operating out of ITCs aren't subject to the regulatory control of the General Medical Council (not that it does much to protect patients) and may be safely back overseas before any complications set in.

The importance of long-term monitoring and follow-up, especially for orthopaedic surgery, cannot be overestimated. In the NHS there's a huge vested interest in getting the operation right first time because your failures come limping back to outpatients for years if you don't. But as researchers in Exeter found (*Eye* 1124), hip operations done outside the NHS without local accountability and follow-up have a much higher failure rate.

Those in favour of ITCs claim their governance procedures are stricter than for NHS trusts and that they achieved a 96 percent satisfaction rate with patients. Alas, so did Harold Shipman – what matters is the outcome. "New" Labour's policy of "payment by results" is anything but. It is payment by activity, irrespective of the result. ITCs may provide short-term gains but any long-term problems will be lumped on the NHS.

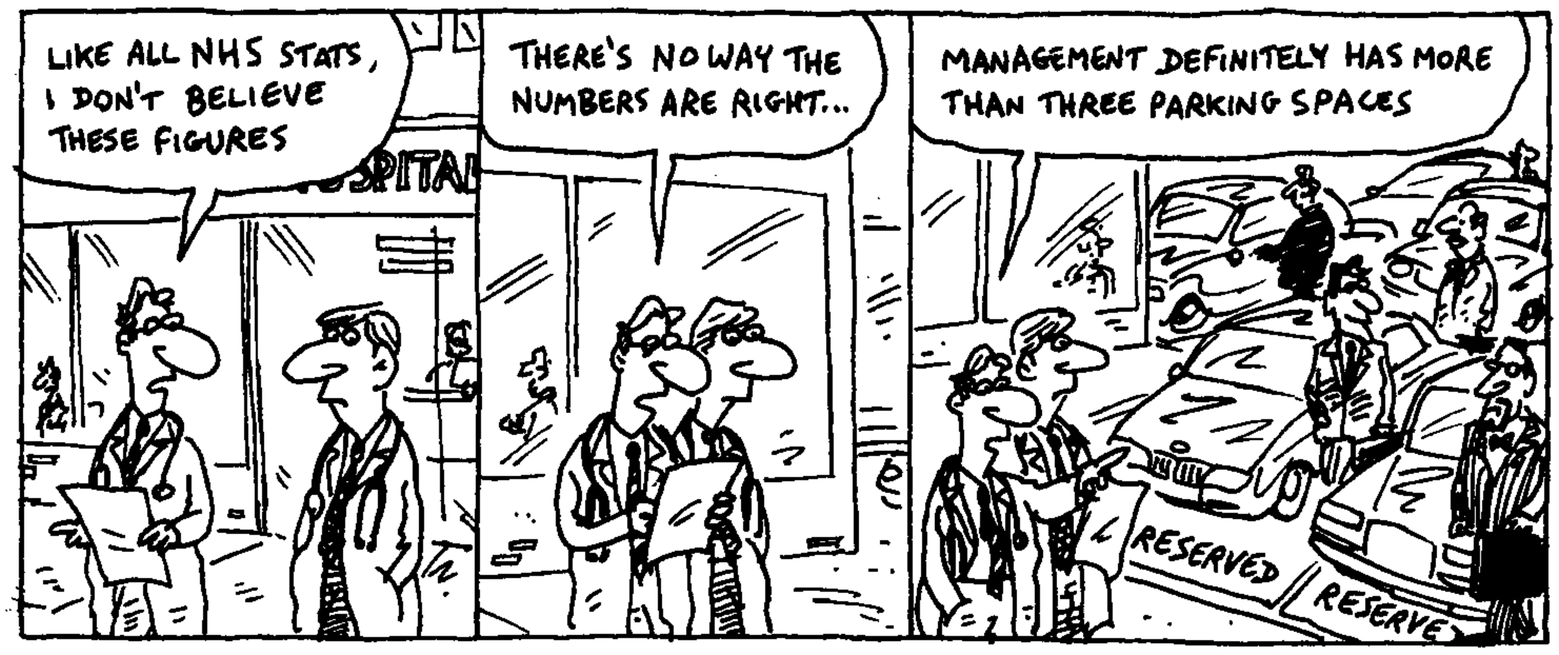
ITCs currently have no remit to train NHS surgeons, which could be disastrous for the future. Orthopaedic waiting lists have been unacceptably long, but as the new consultants' contract proved, this is not because NHS surgeons aren't putting the hours in. Most no longer have protected beds, free from MRSA and the dumping of patients from geriatrics or gynaecology. Most would love to work in the new treatment centres but are barred by absurd legislation from doing so.

Instead of engaging NHS staff, "new" Labour distrusts what it perceives as the conservatism of doctors, and has bypassed their opinions and expertise in favour of expensive, foreign, private companies. Hewitt may claim she will be listening but there soon won't be much left of NHS surgery to listen to.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY


LIKE ALL NHS STATS, I DON'T BELIEVE THESE FIGURES
THERE'S NO WAY THE NUMBERS ARE RIGHT...
MANAGEMENT DEFINITELY HAS MORE THAN THREE PARKING SPACES
RESERVED
RESERVE

SIGNAL FAILURES

Listen up

ONE of the easiest ways Tony Blair can show he's listening in his third term is to accept that the Tories' rail privatisation was botched.

Fragmenting the rail network for the bits to be handed to profit-driven companies was unpopular even before it began, and since then services overall have worsened while fares and subsidy have rocketed.

The last Labour conference voted for gradual renationalisation; but Blair ignored that and showed his arrogance by sanctioning reprivatisation of South Eastern Trains – which has been relatively *successful* since the state took over from Connex (*Eyes passim*). Nobody has ever produced a watertight argument for train franchises but the drawbacks are obvious, not least the haemorrhage of cash that would otherwise be spent on services.

Meanwhile the big train operators are reporting hefty rises in rail profits. This month FirstGroup announced UK rail profits rose 36 percent, to £67.7m, in 2004-05, and a 10 percent rise in dividends. Did its trains improve 36 percent, or even 10 percent, in that year? Er, no. In April 2004 WorstGroup took over commuter services into Paddington. Latest statistics show that in the last quarter of 2004 those services were the least punctual of all in the south-east during the peak. Just 68.9 percent of trains were on time, slightly worse than Thames Trains in the same period in 2003.

First Great Western did improve a little on its earlier poor performance, but 24.3 percent of trains still arrived late. (Network Rail and Railtrack are partly to blame, because of years of dire Great Western infrastructure.) On TransPennine Express, which FirstGroup and Keolis took over in February 2004, just 68 percent of trains were on time in the last quarter of 2004. Comparison with 2003 is impossible because TPE is a reshaped franchise; but in November passengers suffered mass cancellations because of a driver dispute and poor train maintenance (*Eye* 1120). In October FirstGroup took over ScotRail and punctuality promptly fell – 79.8 percent in the last quarter of 2004 versus 81.7 the same period in 2003.

WorstGroup bosses are delighted with what they describe as "strong performance in UK rail": they obviously mean strong financial performance, not performance encountered by passengers. Once again that shows how private train companies' aims conflict with passengers' needs and government aims. If such mediocrity as FirstGroup trains merits a 36 percent profit rise, it's not surprising British trains are less punctual overall than before privatisation.

A priority for Blair's third term is to cut public funding for rail. In March a think-tank called the Catalyst Forum calculated that renationalising would knock at least £500m a year off the state's rail bill, but there's no sign of Blair listening to such logic. Instead "new" Labour is likely to close stations, reduce or axe services and order more inflation-busting fare rises to force more people to go by car.

ANOTHER idiocy Blair could easily correct is Network Rail's official classification as a private company although it depends on government underwriting its massive borrowing (Eye 1059).

NR's directors have awarded themselves performance bonuses of 55 percent of their basic pay, almost the 60 percent maximum they're allowed. That's despite thousands of passengers being ripped off because NR didn't give train companies proper warning of engineering work, so service-specific Apex tickets couldn't be sold (*Eye* 1114).

If NR were officially state-owned, NR bosses' salaries would be regarded as reward enough in themselves for cutting delays. But "new" Labour's stubborn insistence that NR is private introduces the corporate world's executive pay incentives. "If you look at the bonuses paid to any of the directors of FTSE 100 companies, ours are substantially below," said NR chairman Ian McAllister. Has he forgotten NR only exists because Railtrack was too obsessed with keeping up with other FTSE 100 companies to be a "boring old utility" looking after the rail network?

'Dr B. Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

PORTER HOUSE BLUES

GLUM faces among Dame Shirley Porter's cronies at Westminster city council, who last week spectacularly failed in their attempt to destroy the political career of the man who exposed their former leader's corruption in the "homes for votes" scandal of the 1980s (*Eyes passim*).

Westminster's Tories saw an opportunity to take revenge on Labour group leader, Paul Dimoldenberg, after he leaked "confidential" documents to the BBC Today programme in 2003. They supported claims that Westminster was dragging its feet over recovering the £42m in surcharges owed by Porter. After the embarrassing broadcast the council pulled its finger out, eventually reaching a £12m settlement with the fugitive Dame. It also set in train a quasi-legal process by which Dimoldenberg was accused of "bringing the council into disrepute" for having leaked the documents. The case was investigated by the local government watchdog, the Standards Board for England (SBE). Last Friday, after a three-day hearing, the SBE's adjudication panel found that Dimoldenberg had technically breached the code, but imposed no penalty. The decision was notable for accepting the main plank of Dimoldenberg's defence – that he had acted all along in the public interest. Dimoldenberg would have faced disqualification as a councillor if the panel had accepted Westminster's view of the matter.

The SBE has now asked councils for their views on including, on a permanent basis, the public interest defence for councillors who disclose "confidential" information. Watch this space.

HELAL MEAT

SO FAREWELL, THEN, Helal Abbas, ousted as Labour leader of Tower Hamlets council.

During his three years at the helm, East Enders saw the police open fraud investigations into four separate council-funded organisations. Three councillors were suspended from the Labour party as a result and two have since been charged with fraud offences (*Eyes passim*).

The council decided it was time to take a "principled stand" against corruption, launching investigations which have cost taxpayers hundreds of thousands of pounds.

Cllr Abbas's role as a fraud-buster was going smoothly until the arrival on the scene of a mysterious figure known only as "Candidate A".

Housing Corporation investigators, looking into allegations of election fraud at Spitalfields Housing Association in 1998, identified Candidate A as a central figure in the case. A leaked Housing Corporation document referred to Candidate A having used "votes" from an out-of-date members' register – which included the names of a number of dead people – in his attempt to win a seat on the board of the association.

Since January this year, Cllr Abbas has been asked four times if he was Candidate A. On the most recent occasion, in April, Labour councillors voted to ban all public questions at a Tower Hamlets council meeting, supposedly to ensure impartiality during the general election campaign. This didn't stop Isle of Dogs resident Shirley Houghton raising the issue at an "alternative" meeting held in offices next to the council chamber. She asked Cllr Abbas whether he was Candidate A, "the councillor investigated for allegations that included vote rigging and casting the votes of the dead in an election".

Answer came there none.

● **NEWS that Bluewater shopping centre, near Dartford in Kent, had banned customers from wearing "clothing which deliberately obscures the face such as hooded tops and baseball caps" was greeted with enthusiasm by Tony Blair and the media. In the same week, the local authority, Dartford borough council (slogan: "*If only ALL Councils were like Dartford*") was doing its best to engender a culture of respect among local youngsters with regard to the VE Day commemorations. A full-page ad in the local paper announced: "Across the borough, councillors distributed thousands of baseball caps to children, triggering debate in classrooms about the experience of veterans and the part they played in our freedom". Yo vets! Nuff respeck!**

BEARS IN THE WOODS?

COUNTRYSIDE PROPERTIES, the developer which repeatedly denied the presence of asbestos on the former site of the world's largest asbestos textile factory where it intends to build 650 homes and a children's nursery, has belatedly admitted that some of the 72-acre site in Rochdale is contaminated with asbestos.

Last week it filed an emergency closure application for Woodlands Road, a public lane that leads through the site. Ostensibly to safeguard public safety, the road closure conveniently prevents outsiders from monitoring the developers' attempts to clean up the site. Indeed, the vantage point from which the *Eye* filmed the clandestine removal of asbestos by contractors (1129) will no longer be accessible.

The closure, which extends initially to 13 June, was granted by Chris Nolan, the highways officer for Rochdale metropolitan borough council, without consulting ward councillors or the head of planning, Ken Smith. On the evening the notice was put up, Smith was interviewed on BBC local radio and asked if there was any health risk. He replied: "I don't think there is any risk." This is at odds with Nolan's closure notice, which says: "The prohibition is required as a precaution to prevent the public coming into contact with asbestos waste."

ROOMS WITH A VIEW

DESPITE strong local opposition it appears that Tory-controlled West Somerset district council is willing to go to extraordinary lengths to justify its decision to spend £4m on building plush new council offices on Minehead seafront.

The offices are to be built on a car park currently used by visitors to the area's main tourist attraction, the West Somerset Railway, and will be financed by selling another of Minehead's major car parks to a supermarket retailer. Although Minehead is a tourist town and therefore in need of all its existing parking, the council commissioned London-based consultants Donaldsons, who don't come cheap, to prove how great the town's need was for a new supermarket.

Donaldsons reported that what Minehead really needs is a store about the size of an average Tesco. Not mentioned in the report was that Minehead already has an average-sized Tesco.

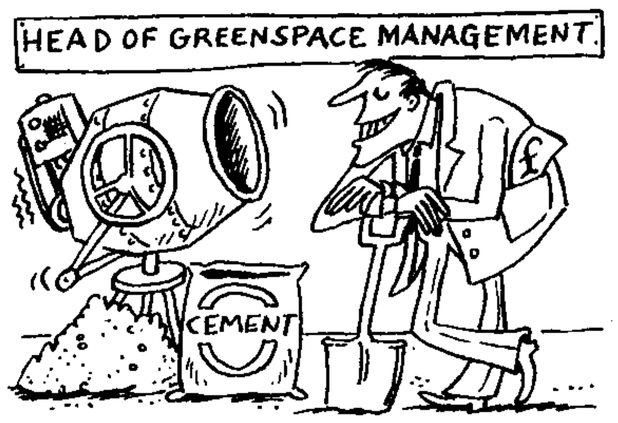
A large protest march made no difference, nor did 6,000 signatures on a petition, nor a vociferous public meeting. But why so determined? Well, without the money from the retail sale only the most basic new office building would be affordable – and not in the desirable seafront location.

SLOGAN WATCH

● **"Discover the spirit"** – *Doncaster metropolitan borough council.*

● **"Together we Serve"** – *Kirklees council.*

● **"Central to the Oxford-Cambridge arc"** – *Bedfordshire County Council.*



LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

EVEN in the wide open spaces of Scotland the demands of the private finance initiative mean kids are being crammed in to cramped schools while their playing fields are built on.

Such is the result of a £100m PFI project to be signed shortly by Highland council under which Alpha Schools, a consortium controlled by AWG (formerly Anglian Water), will build and run 11 new schools, two of which are going ahead despite loud opposition.

Portree High school in Skye is to be rebuilt on its existing inadequate site despite calls for new premises. One of two playing fields will be lost and the planned new school has already been described by the Royal Fine Arts Commission as "extremely disappointing" and by the council's own planning officer as "mediocre" and "not the sort of uplifting place extolled by the executive".

Back on the mainland in Dingwall, the existing secondary school is to be replaced with a new one on what are now playing fields. While new facilities are promised, these will mostly be man-made surfaces less suited to school sports and the childhood habit of falling over.

Announcing planning permission for the work last month, Highland council reported receiving 205 letters in support of the development but neglected to mention the ballot of 3,000 Dingwall residents, run by the electoral reform society, in which 73.5 percent of the voters *rejected* the project. The two Highland councillors representing Dingwall (one of them a member of the Scottish Labour policy forum) claimed that local campaigners were jeopardising the whole PFI project and backed the deal despite a further rejection from Dingwall community council. Its deputy chairman Morris Grant said: "Bulldozing the playing fields and local opposition seems an odd way for a Labour councillor to support his party's policy of improving children's fitness."

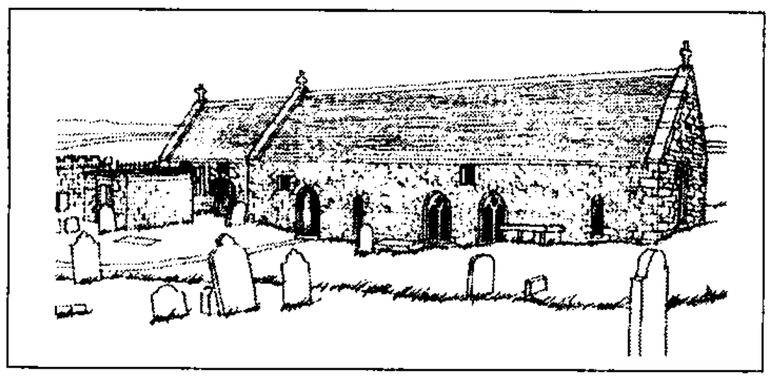
IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

SORRY, GUYS, BUT YOUR KARAOKE NIGHT HAS BEEN A COMPLETE DISASTER
BUT PEOPLE LOVE A GOOD SINGALONG!
WHAT BETTER WAY TO GET A PARTY GOING THAN BY BOOZILY BELTING OUT THE CLASSICS?
THAT'S THE PROBLEM – GREGORIAN CHANT JUST DOESN'T SEEM TO WORK WITH THE STAG AND HEN CROWD

NOOKS and CORNERS

WHAT John Betjeman (sainted founder of this column) once identified as "antiquarian prejudice" – reverence for archaeology at the expense of architecture – remains a curse; an attitude that prefers a ruin or even the foundations of an historic structure to a complete building.

Ruins can be magnificent (if the original was) and – like Tintern or Fountains – create a "picturesque" incident in a landscape to inspire poets and aesthetes. But ruins can also be pointless: the shells of abandoned or burned-out buildings that are neither beautiful or useful, with internal surfaces



St Columba's Church – roofed?...

of hideous rubble that were never meant to be seen. They can also be expensive to maintain: walls soaked by the weather on both sides crumble faster and the tops of the walls must be sealed to stop disintegration. Better, surely, to put a roof back on so a building is restored to its original appearance, is easier to maintain and can serve a useful purpose.

Antiquarian prejudice is alive and well at Historic Scotland, however, judging by the extraordinary case of St Columba's Church at Uidh on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. This is a 14th century structure standing in an ancient cemetery on an isthmus near Stornoway. In use for worship until the 1830s, it is now a roofless shell, threatened by subsidence with the steady collapse of the cemetery into the sea.

In 2000 Urras Eaglais na h-Aoidhe (the Uidh Church Trust) was set up at a public meeting with the intention of restoring the church as a heritage centre and for community use. This, naturally, involved putting a new roof over the building and constructing sea defences. The experienced conservation architects, Simpson & Brown, prepared a feasibility study. But in 2002, after delays and prevarication, consent for the work was refused by Historic Scotland which demanded a conservation plan.

The following year a draft conservation plan was submitted by the trust's architects. This met all the criteria of the heritage lottery fund, which suggested it might support the project up to 90 percent of the total estimated cost of £510,000. Heritage Scotland managed to comment on the final plan by the following year, but evidently preferred leaving St Columba's as a "consolidated ruin".

This was despite the fact that John Addison, the leading conservation engineer in Scotland, demonstrated that the most economical and effective way of stabilising and protecting the structure was to re-roof it. Historic Scotland's engineers, however, preferred screwing in piles, regardless of damage to archaeological remains in the ancient cemetery.

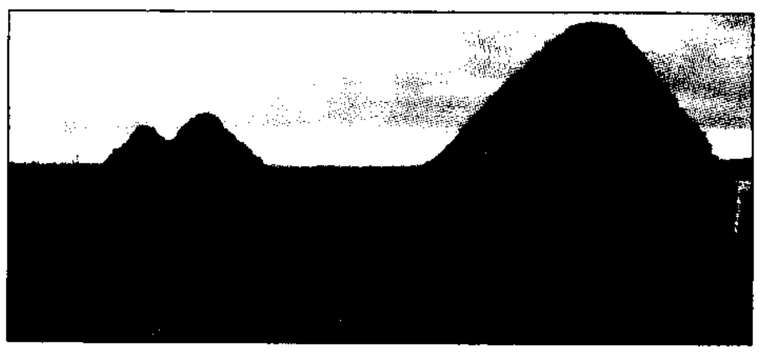
Finally, last month – after a visit to the site by a new inspector and other experts – Historic Scotland came clean and baldly stated that "we do not accept the roof".

This was after five years of negotiations and the expenditure of some £20,000 by a small trust, in the full knowledge that, as the secretary of Urras Eaglais na h-Aoidhe put it, if it is made "impossible for the trust's vision to be realised, the trust will simply disband and the community will walk away... leaving Historic Scotland to preside over the collapse of an internationally significant site into the sea."

Such obstruction by Historic Scotland is even more reprehensible considering that not only has it put a new roof – with hideous velux rooflights – over a medieval chapel at Cille Bharraigh which it owns, but has cheerfully "restored" the Great Hall of Stirling Castle by destroying later Hanoverian alterations and erecting a very expensive new timber roof over the cleared space below, despite the absence of firm evidence of the design of the 16th century original.

Antiquarian prejudice usually triumphs, so a long battle has been fought to stop the owner of the ruined Castle Tioram at Moidart making that building habitable.

Why? Scotland may be a land of ruins, but restoring old buildings does not offend the principles of William Morris and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings providing it is made clear what is new work and what is old.



... or roofless?

This was often done in the past, sometimes by distinguished architects who could work in imaginative sympathy with the historic fabric. If Historic Scotland had existed in the 19th century, perhaps Dunblane Cathedral, say, and Paisley Abbey would have remained roofless picturesque ruins rather than be restored for worship; similarly with Haddington Priory – also medieval – in the 20th century.

So what is so special about the pathetic rubble walls of remote St Columba's that Historic Scotland insists it cannot be re-roofed and restored? The problem is that Historic Scotland – like English Heritage – is now dominated by academic archaeologists, who – as Betjeman pointed out – lack any aesthetic sense. Their pedantry over St Columba's suggests they also lack commonsense.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

This shows the deeply philistine nature of our royal family.
ROLF HARRIS TO PAINT THE QUEEN!
80TH BIRTHDAY PORTRAIT
A painted portrait, in this day and age?!
A conceptual installation, now...
I see a heap of old tyres...

I-SPY *Switzerland*

Submitted by Matt Harvey. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THERE was no victory for classical music in last week's court of appeal ruling, granting copyright on the "performing editions" of several 18th century pieces by Michel de Lalande to their modern editor.

Independent record company Hyperion lost its fight with academic Dr Lionel Sawkins, who claimed that his work editing the score into a condition suited to 21st century musicians gave him musical copyright in the works.

Not only does the ruling create potential problems for *any* new recordings from early manuscripts which have to be tidied up and corrected for performance, the vast legal costs will force Hyperion – one of very few labels recording new serious classical works – to make huge cutbacks to its work for the next few years.

The appeal court backed last year's decision by Mr Justice Patten that in preparing the manuscript for performance, Dr Sawkins' copying involved enough originality to earn him copyright, even though the music still sounded as Lalande intended.

As reported in *Eye* 1124, Dr Sawkins' winnings are likely to be small, but the cost to Hyperion is huge since Dr Sawkins instructed the *Eye's* old friends Carter Fuck on a conditional fee agreement which the record company fears will double the real legal cost to up to £1m.

"Hyperion now is forced to reconsider its general recorded output and will be reducing dramatically its commitment to many new recordings over the next year or two to concentrate on fund-raising activities to help with the legal costs and to keep a limited number of new recordings in its diary," said a spokeswoman. "The collateral damage caused by this decision not only will affect the prosperity of the company but also the dozens of artists and groups, producers, engineers, composers, music publishers and musical editors but most importantly the record-buying public whose access to rare and collectable repertoire served by Hyperion, and perhaps many of the other record labels, will be severely diminished."

THE conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Alexander Lazarev, has scandalised the locals by declaring that his orchestra should leave its home in Glasgow's Royal Concert Hall and decamp to Edinburgh.

His reasons aren't too clear beyond the fact that he thinks Edinburgh a nicer place with more accommodating halls (a dubious assumption). But it was one hell of an undiplomatic thing to say about an orchestra that's been based in Glasgow since 1891. And he only dared say it because he happens to be leaving his job this summer, which makes the remark a sort of two-fingered gesture of farewell.

That he's just been made an honorary professor at Glasgow University doesn't make it any better. But perhaps the hon. chair will be shortlived. Spurned Glaswegians are demanding that Lazarev be stripped of his perks of office as punishment for being so ungrateful to the city that's supported him for eight years.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Private Eye

Lookalike

McCririck

Glazer

Sir,

Has anyone else noticed the strange resemblance between the betting pundit who usually gets it right, and John McCririck, the resident Channel 4 'dead cert' lunatic.

I think we (and the United board) ought to be kept informed.

Yours faithfully,
NICHOLAS HILL,

Kingston Blount.

Wealth & Safety

Sir,

Your article "Shell Makes a Killing" (1132) is misleading in reporting that "no serious action was taken" by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) following union complaints about Shell's business improvement project and possible safety implications for its offshore installations.

HSE did in fact launch a programme of visits by inspectors to Shell offices and to three of Shell's installations: Cormorant Alpha, Brent Charlie and Nelson platforms that the unions had identified as posing particular risk to workers' safety.

They interviewed 150 employees, carried out an in depth, 3,000 man-hour examination of Shell's systems and procedures for managing maintenance of safety critical equipment in the Brent field.

The investigation identified a need for Shell to improve its system for assessing the risks posed by its restructuring plan and for auditing the changes it introduced. As a result, HSE agreed with Shell an extensive remedial programme to deal with this.

Yours faithfully,
TOM MCLAREN,

Principal Inspector HSE Offshore Division, Aberdeen.

Proper charlies

Sir,

It is quite offensive to publish a piece in Street of Shame (Eye 1132) about the apparent treatment of Charlie Dimmock by the Daily Mail following the scrapping of Ground Force and then to run a spoof ad in the same edition entitled "The Weeping Charlie". As you say yourself, this is a woman who has suffered a recent double bereavement and now the loss of her career. Your choice of phrase in the ad – "officially washed up" – only compounds the offence, given the circumstances of the bereavement.

Yours faithfully,
PRISCILLA APPELBE,

Altrincham, Cheshire.

● *Good point. Ed.*

Vote early, vote often

Sir,

There were probably lots of election cock-ups but students being registered in two different constituencies wasn't one of them. Students are allowed to be on the electoral register both at home and at their university address. They can only vote in one of the two places in the parliamentary election, but they can vote in both places in local elections, provided the two places are not covered by the same council (for example, this year, in the same county).

Regards,
HELEN ELSOM,

Cambridge.

Bunker mentality

Sir,

Re: Library disposals

Having been an elected member of Dorset county council for a whole two days, I have already uncovered a burning issue. It concerns the nuclear bunker at County Hall.

Originally intended as the final refuge of the chief executive and other (mostly post-procreative) important people, this ultimate retreat is now inhabited by several thousand old library books. The hatchway that gives access to the bunker is more or less permanently blocked by library vans.

So, if the holocaust finally wipes out Dorchester, it is old library books, not council chiefs, who will fly the flag for the human race in Dorset.

I think this is an awfully good idea, don't you?

Yours,
DAVID MILSTED,

Dorset County Councillor (Lib Dem).

Don't-care system?

Sir,

"Trawling for the truth?" (1131) appears to have missed the point. Focusing on a (convicted) sex offender and the temptation for victims to lie in order to gain financial compensation detracts from the underlying problems affecting the residential child care system in Britain.

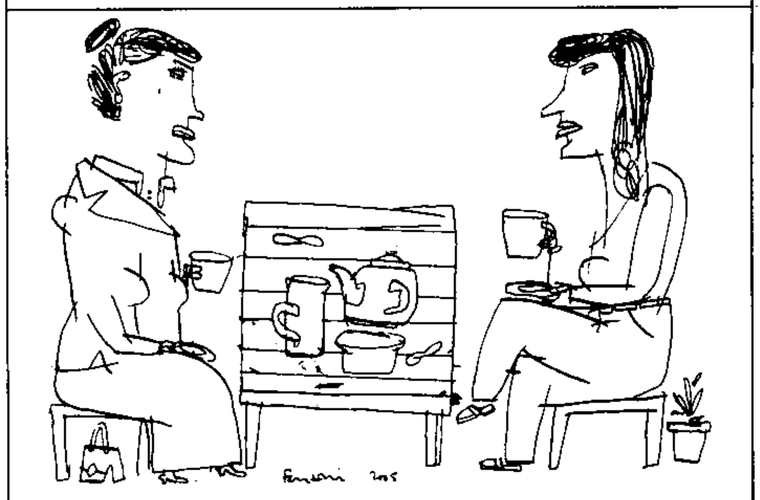
Various government reports in the 1990s have catalogued the gross failings of the care system. For example, in 1998 the Children's Safeguard Review pointed out that much of the abuse and neglect "wasn't just a failure by care staff... The whole system had failed". It is questionable how much has been learned from these reports.

As a residential worker in the 1990s I was often the only member of staff working on a night shift. I was part of a rota system implemented by senior social work management intent on cutting costs. The opportunity for corroboration in the event of me abusing residents or in a false allegation being made against me was minimal. A few months ago a large residential school in Scotland was closed following allegations of abuse and malpractice. There is likely to be a "trawl" for the truth and concerns about the validity of victims' testaments is likely to be called into question. It is worth noting that these children are not representative of our "new" Labour classless society; most come from families experiencing significant poverty and deprivation. Who is interested in the fact that children leaving care are over-represented in the statistics on homelessness, prison, prostitution, drug misuse and mental illness? Perhaps a campaign about the institutional failings that have created a miscarriage of justice for thousands of children might compete for the Paul Foot Award.

DR GAVIN HERON,

Glasgow School of Social Work, University of Strathclyde.

Scenes You Seldom See



"We had Polish workmen do the extension. They were incredibly expensive and the work was so bad we had to get it all redone"

Target practice

Sir,

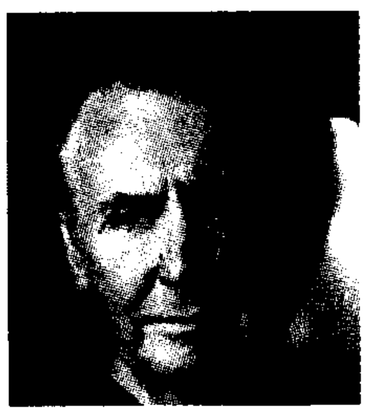
In The Back ("Snafu what a scorcher", Eye 1132) is unfair to the USAF. It is actually very good news that last month a B2 stealth aircraft flew all the way from its home base and only missed its target by 1,000 feet. This represents a scale of magnitude improvement. On 20 July 2004 a USAF B52 made a well-reported sortie all the way to and from its home base in the USA in order to make a low fly past at the Farnborough Airshow. To the well publicised bemusement of the assembled spectators, the B52 missed its target by over 24,000 feet and made its flypast at Blackbushe instead, an airfield approximately four nautical miles to the northwest!

So the USAF is improving rapidly. Perhaps when it gets really good it will be allowed to take part in wars and only the bad guys on the ground will be killed.

Yours faithfully
MIKE POST,

Marlow, Bucks.

Lookalike



Palpatine

Christie

Sir,

I can't help but notice the uncanny resemblance between Tony Christie and the Dark Lord of the Sith, Palpatine. Are they by any chance related? Dark forces at work would certainly seem to account for the otherwise inexplicable recent success of 'Is this the way to Amarillo'.

Regards,
IAIN COLLINS,

London E16.

Whom with a view

Sir,

I hate to criticise a fellow pedant, but just what does correspondent Francis Pott (Letters, 1132) think should be the subject of the relative clause "whoever [sic] put this... together" [sic]? Surely not "whomever" – I know modern British dictionaries claim "who" may now be an objective pronoun in place of the "rarely used" (speak for yourself) more formal "whom", but not, to my knowledge, the other way round. And to think, you Brits accuse the Americans of slaughtering the mother tongue!

IAN WATSON,

Chelsea.

"He died of exhaustion looking for his car keys"

Lookalike

Tutankhamun

Portman

Sir,

I was struck recently by the similarity between the newly-shorn Hollywood starlet Natalie Portman and Prince Tutankhamun of Egypt.

I wonder if by any chance they are related?

Yours,
DAN STEWART,
London W12.

Cheesy grin

Sir,

Re Colemanballs (1132): "Up there in the audience is friend and fellow teacher Kelly, who's grinning like some sort of Cheshire cheese – Chris Tarrant". Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable's entry under "Grin like a Cheshire cat, To" is:

"An old simile popularized by Lewis Carroll... The phrase has never been satisfactorily explained. [One theory is] Cheshire cheese was once sold moulded like a cat that appeared to be grinning."

ADAM DAVIES,
Via email.

SOLUTIONS

"Life-Paths: Simplified Funeral & cremation Solutions" – *undertakers*

"Specialist hair-cleansing solutions" – *shampoo*

"Complete laundry solutions from Bosch" – *washing machines*

"Invesco Client Solutions Team" – *complaints department*

"boysolution" – *pornographic website from spam email*

"Avian Solutions: Specialists in Urban Bird Management" – *pigeon cullers*

"Waterford Crystal Gifting Solutions" – *presents*

"Metra provide meteorological presentation solutions" – *weather forecasts* (BBC press release on its new 3D graphics)

"Engineering Solutions" – programme substituted for Today programme on Radio 4 on day of BBC strike

All submitted by readers

Figure it out

Sir,

Number Crunching: £100,000 = prize money for winner of ITV's Celebrity Love Island. £100,000 = prize money for winner of Gulbenkian Museum of the Year.

Yours,
R. DYKE (15),
Wincanton, Somerset.

Silly burka

Sir,

Heath's cartoon about building workers leering at women in burkas could, at a pinch, be put in your Scenes You Seldom See series but is really **so** *20th century. His problem is that nowadays it is a serious offence punishable by dismissal for builders to audibly harass passers-by (whatever they may be wearing).*

When passing any building site (certainly in London) look for notices attached to scaffolding, etc, which will say that the company in question is part of the Considerate Builders Scheme which will, among other things, forbid workers from causing offence to the local public.

FRANK DESMOND,
London SE7.

And another thing...

Sir,

Shortly after unwisely boasting of "doing it five times a night", Blair puts his back out. Oh, the irony.

Yours faithfully,
KATHRYN MARRIOTT,
Via email.

Sir,

It seems to me that the only real benefit to be gained from the Labour election victory is the continuance of St Albion Parish News. Although I may have appreciated Letter from Transylvania even more.

ALAN CUDMORE,
Brentford, Middlesex.

Sir,

You and Weakest Link could still be right, despite Christopher Chippindale BA, PhD, MIFA, FSA. According to the Shorter Oxford navy beans is another name for haricot beans.

ROBERT DAVIES,
London SE3.

Sir,

After years of the Daily Mail complaining about falling academic standards, fraud among the exam boards and declining standards, I was surprised to notice that when I completed their online spelling test it informed me "Your score was 9 out of a possible 10. Excellent. You scored full marks."

KATE SMURTHWAITE,
London.

Sir,

Pace your woolly Parisian correspondent (Letters, 1132) and in vindication of your cartoonist – the May 18 edition of Now magazine pictures a Missoni necklace.

*What is more, it is part of a feature on Coleen McLoughlin, the better(?) half of a footballer who might be regarded as the definitive Premiersh*t.*

Yours faithfully,
ELLEN COLLINS,
London N4.

Sir,

Does the person who compiles Pseuds Corner have a sense of humour? They included a line I wrote about pizza and society but the piece was written with tongue in proverbial.

What gives?

MATTHEW TEMPLE,
Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"... and he has lit the fuse to a match that was already boiling..."

ALAN PARRY, Sky Sports
(Jack McKenna)

"Jose Mourinho has got the Midas touch right now – everything he touches turns to silver."

RICHARD KEYES, Sky Sports
(Ollie Doward)

"I thought we started very, very brightly but then the Achilles Heel which has bitten us in the backside all year has stood out like a sore thumb."

ANDY KING (Swindon Manager)
(Stewart Cruttenden)

"The barometer is still the bread and butter, especially away from home."

MIKE INGHAM, Radio 5 Live
(Arthur Davis)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

COMPENSATION CULTURE IS COMPLETELY OUT OF HAND.
IT MAKES MY JOB IMPOSSIBLE!
YOU'LL BE HEARING FROM MY LAWYER.
CLAIM FOR DAMAGES.

Letter from **Khartoum**

from Our Own Correspondent

THE comprehensive peace agreement, to which the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) put their signatures in January, with some nudging from your diplomats, is neither comprehensive and nor has it delivered peace.

Instead it has demonstrated that if we Sudanese want a share of the pie, we will have to fight for it. This explains the timing of the Darfur rebellion in Western Sudan and the increasing restiveness in other neglected and marginalised regions of our vast country.

The Sudanese pie is now huge thanks to the production of half a million barrels of oil a day and to the $4.5bn dollars recently pledged by the donors for "post-conflict reconstruction". Given the high stakes, it's unlikely the SPLA or the Khartoum government will embrace the holy grail of "good governance" recommended by your Tony Blair's Africa Commission. They're far more likely to divide up the loot and create two oil-fuelled kleptocracies on the Nile where once there was one.

This is unlikely to be peaceful, despite the anticipated deployment of a large UN peacekeeping force. Its vanguard has already arrived, its most tangible achievement to push up house rental prices at an unprecedented rate and increase traffic congestion in our unbearably hot and dusty city where most people are homeless refugees from the war.

The deadly US/UK alliance that brought the Iraq disaster to the world has also been at work here. The big difference is that while the "intelligence" on supposed links between Saddam and Al-Qa'eda was rubbish, the links between Khartoum and Al-Qa'eda are concrete facts.

Osama bin Laden spent several happy years on the Nile doing deals with our neo-fundamentalist regime. Luckily for the likes of vice-president Ali Osman Taha (the real power here) and his nominal boss, President Omar Bashir, they ejected Osama some time before 9/11 and started opening their secret files on Al-Qa'eda to the CIA.

This makes the Khartoum regime, which is even now waging a vicious *jihad* (albeit one against fellow Muslims) in Darfur, a vital strategic ally of President Bush's global war on terror. Our spy chief, Salah Abdallah Gosh (a man linked both to Osama bin Laden and to war crimes in Darfur), was a recent VIP visitor to Washington.

The west's moral outrage at Sudan remains high. Neo-cons regularly recommend regime change and intrepid western journalists have filed numerous exclusives on "genocide" in Darfur. All of which is embarrassing for western oil companies keen to get back into Sudan. For years they have had to watch the "unscrupulous" Chinese, Malaysians and French get all the deals.

One advantage of the peace deal is that it will allow UK and US oil companies back here. The word on the street is that instead of having to deal with the wily Arabs in the north, they'll be able to go straight to the less experienced ex-rebels in the south where desperation for the spoils of peace is likely to provide rich pickings for canny oil executives.

The previously unheard of White Nile Company, "investment vehicle" of former England left arm spin bowler Phil Edmonds, made headlines recently by signing a massive oil deal with the SPLA for exploration rights in an area of the south the size of England. White Nile's stock promptly hit the ceiling and the London stock exchange had to suspend trading pending publication of details of the agreement. White Nile's deal is problematic because the SPLA is still a rebel organisation and because the government has already granted the block in question to the French oil giant, Total.

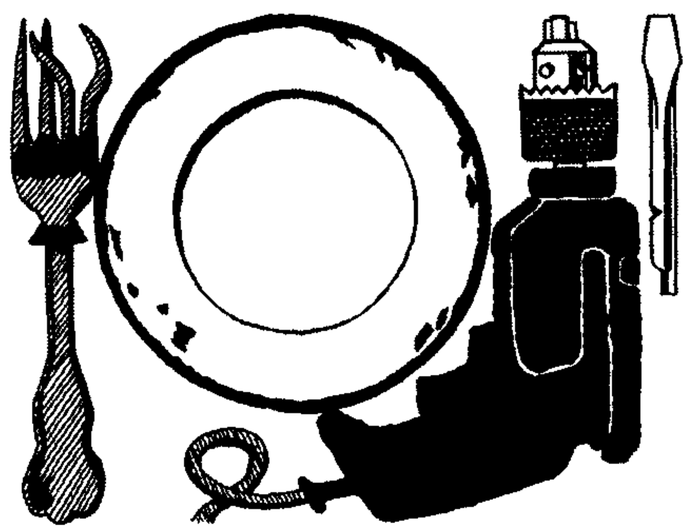
Meanwhile the UK's man here, William Patey, has got a fine reward for all his diplomacy in Sudan: redeployment as Mr Tony's ambassador in Baghdad.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "When the prisoner first claimed that she was pregnant, nobody believed her," a spokesman for Kartal prison in Istanbul told reporters, "because it didn't seem technically possible. She'd been in solitary confinement for months, and we thought she had just been overeating, and that this was just a ruse to get herself moved to a better cell. But then she showed us the hole she'd drilled in the concrete wall separating her from her lover, and told us that they'd been having sex for months, and we realised it was all true."

The spokesman was commenting on the



case of a twenty-seven-year-old female prisoner, Kadriye Fikret Oget, who had just given birth to a child fathered by forty-year-old convicted murderer Seylan Corduk, despite them both being in solitary confinement. "The walls between the cells are 9cm thick and made of solid concrete, but they'd somehow made a hole with their cutlery, and were having sex through it. They admitted they'd been doing it for months, and Corduk is obviously a man of some length, because he'd managed to impregnate Oget. When we discovered what had happened, we held an enquiry, and the prisoners have both been found guilty of damaging public property. Each has been fined 128 euros, and had their sentences increased by four months." *(Hurriyet [Turkey], 28/2/05. Spotter: John St Clair)*

– ● –

● *"You've heard of tasting menus?" chef Homaro Cantu of the Moto restaurant asked reporters in Chicago. "Well, I've taken the idea a stage further, with a menu that you can actually eat. The idea came to me when I wondered what would happen if I put flavoured inks into the cartridges of the Canon i560 inkjet printer I use to print the menus. So I tried it, and realised that I could print flavoured images of different foods directly onto edible soybean and cornstarch paper, and that customers could lick and eat it.*

"Each section of the menu is flavoured according to its regional theme. The Italian entrees taste of mozzarella, basil, and tomato, while the French option suggests Camembert on a baguette. This photograph of a maki roll on the menu, for example, is flavoured with soy and nori powder. So if you tear it off the menu and eat it, you'll know just what to expect if you order the dish.

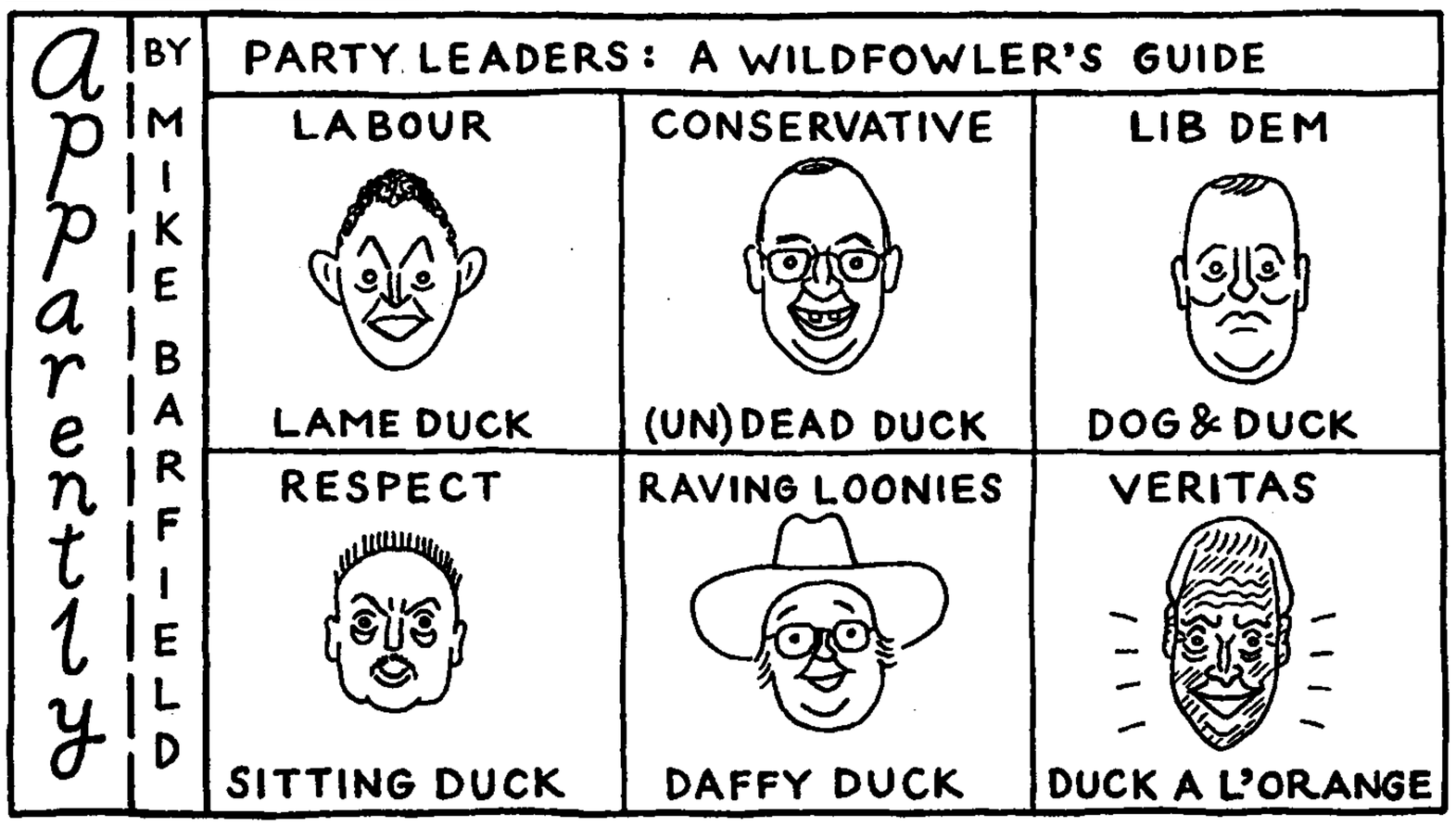
"My father was an engineer, and I've always been interested in mechanics, and in finding the limits of what is possible. At the moment, I'm developing a course that actually floats above the table. I take a cube of whipped silicone, a substance invented by NASA, and imbue it with food aromas in a smoker. Then the waiter holds it above the table, and spins it to release the fragrance. The material becomes lighter than air when it's heated, so it will hover above the heads of the diners for several minutes. I'm also experimenting with injecting helium into foams, to produce foods that are lighter than air and will float just above the plate as they're served.

"I'm convinced that aroma is the next frontier, but the flavour needs to be there too. Otherwise, it's nothing more than a cheap circus act." (Gourmet magazine, January 2005, and The Toronto Globe and Mail, 22/2/05. Spotter: Wallace Brown)

– ● –

● "My client admits that he was drunk when he created a disturbance at Weymouth Bay Caravan Park," defending solicitor Roger Maxwell told Weymouth Magistrates Court. "He admits that he used threatening words and behaviour, he admits to shouting and banging on caravan doors, and he admits to swearing at the police when they handcuffed him. It is also true that he is already the subject of a two-year anti-social behaviour order. But in mitigation, I should point out that, due to an administrative error, the wording on the Asbo specifically states that he is 'prohibited from not being drunk in a public place'."

After consultation with his fellow magistrates, Chairman of the bench Colin Weston passed judgement on thirty-eight-year-old Stephen Winstone. "It is fortunate for you that the Asbo has been badly written, because otherwise we would have been looking to sentence you to prison for up to a couple of years. However, you were technically fulfilling the terms of your Asbo by being drunk in public, so the court will show leniency to you. You are fined £100." *(Dorset Echo, 17/3/05. Spotter: Sue Webb)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hello,

And today I want to focus on two little words both beginning with the same two little letters 'R' and 'E'.

Can any of the children guess what the words are? Yes, Sonali? 'Resign'. No, that's not one of them. Omid? 'Retire'. No that's not one of them either, and it's not funny actually so the rest of you can stop smirking.

No the words I am thinking of are 'Respect' and 'Reform'. Let's just consider those two words shall we?

What do we mean when we say we 'respect' someone? We mean that we are polite to them because we know that they are doing their job and we are not going to criticise them even if they make mistakes – which they don't anyway!

But most of all 'respecting' someone means accepting that they know better than we do and that it would be wrong of us to want them to give up their job and possibly hand over to someone else who isn't as good as them and might even be a disaster!

That's 'Respect', OK?

Which brings me to the second of those two very important little words that I want you all to be thinking about as we go forward into this new chapter in the life of St Albion's.

And, hey, they might be little words but they're mighty big concepts! (And that's from the Greek 'conceptos' meaning an idea stolen from the Conservatives).

'Reform'. What do we mean by 'reform'? It certainly doesn't mean that what came before was bad – unless of course we go all the way back to 1997!

No, obviously, a lot of what's been going on in recent years has been very good!

It's just that it's our job now to make it even better!

And that's why I've asked Mr Birt to draw up some 'blue-sky' plans for some much needed reforms to carry us into a wholly new era!

His first strategy is what he calls the 'Parish Energising and New Ideas Solution' (or PENIS, for short).

This is very exciting and I want everyone to grab hold of Mr Birt's PENIS plan and embrace it with both hands!

So those are the words I want you all to take away with you – Respect, Reform and PENIS.

Which brings me to my fifth and final point.

A lot of parishioners I know have been saying that I was wrong to ask Mr Blunkett back onto the PCC, just because he has gone mad.

Well all I can say, is that David has been through a very difficult period in his life and I really do think we all of us now owe it, both to David and to ourselves, to show compassion and to help him to rebuild his confidence as he begins to sort out the unfortunate mess that someone who shall be nameless (Gordon!) has made of the parish pension fund!

But I'm glad to say that a very good start has already been made on this. Your vicar's pension has been secured and 'ring-fenced' at £3 million a year.

So that, when I eventually decide to hang up my dog-collar, at least I shan't be having to sleep in one of those cardboard boxes in the churchyard.

You see. 'Reform' of our pension plan, and 'Respect' for the vicar. It's those two 'R's' in action.

In fact I've written a special chorus which we're all going to sing at next week's One Parent Family Service (including our new Sunday Club for the Under-5's)!

Reform, reform.
It's got to be the norm.
Respect, respect.
It's what we all expect. (Repeat)

© Words and music T. Blair 2005

Yours respectfully (!)

Tony

P.S. The acronym PENIS has led to some giggling in the back pews by our more adolescent parishioners so we have deemed it advisable to revert to our first thoughts on the Parish Research Investigation Committee for Knowledge – or PRICK for short.

St Albion's Primary School

Salve!

Mr Adonis, who joins us as a new school governor. Although he is only 18, Mr Adonis has some brilliant new ideas, such as selling the school to a group of local businessmen. They are hoping to rename it as the Kwikfit Academy ("We fit you for the world of work, and quick!").

Great to have you on board, Andrew!

Women's Groups

The Vicar's wife, Mrs Booth, gave a very interesting talk on how to increase the power of women in the parish. The solution to this problem, she said, was very simple. In future, only women should be allowed to stand for the PCC. We all wondered why we hadn't thought of it ourselves!

Mrs Jowell gave a vote of thanks, and suggested that the next vicar should be a woman. Who better, she asked, than Mrs Booth herself?

Refreshments, made by Mrs Hewitt, included 'gingerbread men' which everyone enjoyed biting the heads off and then throwing the rest in the bin!

A Wind of Change!

I know that many of you will be delighted to see the new look spire of the church which is now a giant wind turbine providing enough electricity to boil the entire kettle of water needed for the after service coffee!

Isn't that great! The windmill was erected by Mr Doughty's excellent company "Wind Farms Я Us" who were awarded the contract purely on the grounds of merit – and not because, as some mean spirited parishioners are claiming, he made a large donation to parish funds – shame on you, you cynics!

If anyone is in-spired (get it?) by our example they can purchase their own private wind farm from Mr Doughty's webside www.indfarm.co.uk.

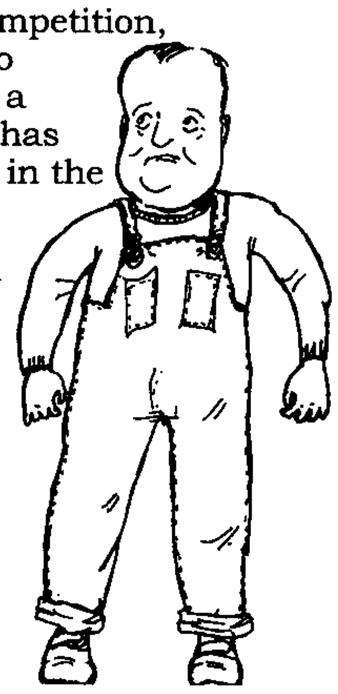
KIDDIES' CORNER

with Miss Blears

For this week's competition, children are invited to colour in a picture of a typical hooligan who has been causing trouble in the parish. Just imagine that he should be made to wear a really nastyish orange uniform, so that everyone will know he is Charles Kennedy!

PS. His face should be red. Can you guess why?

Signed,
Auntie Hazel



SODUTOO *with Mr Brown*

Last week, readers were given a blank grid and asked to fill in the missing numbers, so that the parish books would balance.

No one got exactly the right answer, I'm afraid, but it was:

£	3	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

G.B.

What You Didn't See

THE Sun

★ Name the mystery Piano Man and win Wayne Rooney's FA Cup-Losing Jockstrap! p. 94

Friday, May 27, 2005

TYRANT IN UNDERPANTS

AT LAST we can show you the pathetic sight of the world's most hated man in his undies.

Once he was feared by millions – now we see him as he really is. A sad old man in his Y-fronts.

But don't feel sorry for him. It is all his own fault for inflicting such misery on the millions of *(cont. p. 94)*

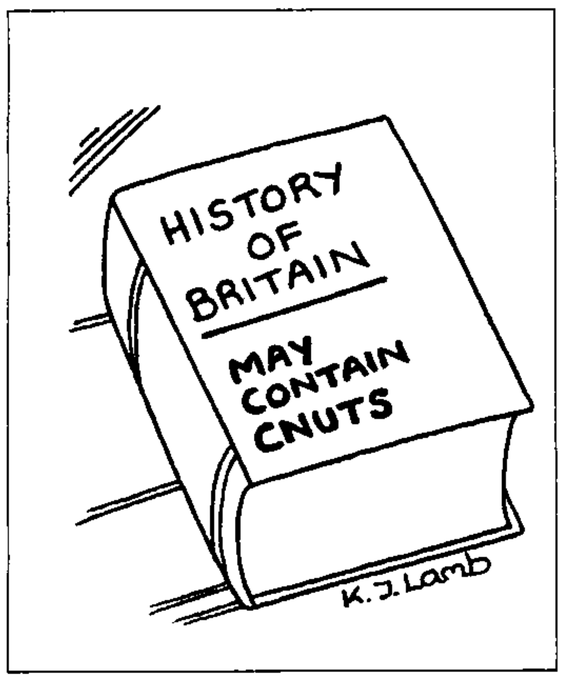
Let's Parlez Franglais!

Lesson 94 Voting dans le Referendum sur le Constitution d'Europe

Jacques Chirac *(pour c'est lui)*: Bonjour, voters! C'est un grand jour pour everyone dans Europe! Et le question est très simple – "Oui" or "Yes". Regardez votre ballot-paper et mettez un grand tick next to votre choice. "Oui" pour un Europe du Future. Or "Yes" pour le future d'Europe!

Tout le monde: Non.

© *Miles Kilometres 2005*



RADIO FOUR

The Today Programme

What You Heard During The Strike

Nicholas Parsons *(for it is he)*: So, you've got just a minute to talk on the subject of "Why the job cuts at the BBC are necessary". Let's start with you, Mark Thompson.

Mark Thompson: I... er... quality... streamlining... digital...

All: Hesitation, deviation, repetition.

Parsons: Ha, ha, ha! No marks for you, Mark.

Thompson: Grrrrr!

Parsons: Help! He's trying to bite my arm off... *(cont. 94 Mhz)*

TWO-TIER PENSION SYSTEM SHOCK

by Our Finance Staff **'Red'Adair Turner**

THE Prime Minister has outlined a radical new proposal for pensions to take effect immediately.

Under the new plan, someone who starts a job in, say, their mid-fifties should have to work much longer and receive a smaller pension than, say, someone who got the job first in their mid-forties and did it much better anyway.

Citing the hypothetical case of a Mr Brown and a Mr White, the Prime Minister pointed out that it would be unfair for the latecomer, Mr Brown, to be treated in the same way as the diligent Mr White, who should obviously be given £3 million on his retirement and a large number of lucrative international posts.

Said Mr Blair, "This would be the just reward for Mr White's long years of hard work, doing a difficult job involving tough decisions such as giving himself a large pension".

Daily Mail

FRIDAY, May 27, 2005

AFFORDABLE HOMES WILL LEAD TO COLLAPSE IN HOUSE PRICES

By Our Political Staff **Paul Dacresofspacetofill**

THE Chancellor's plan to create affordable housing will have a devastating effect on millions of potential homeowners.

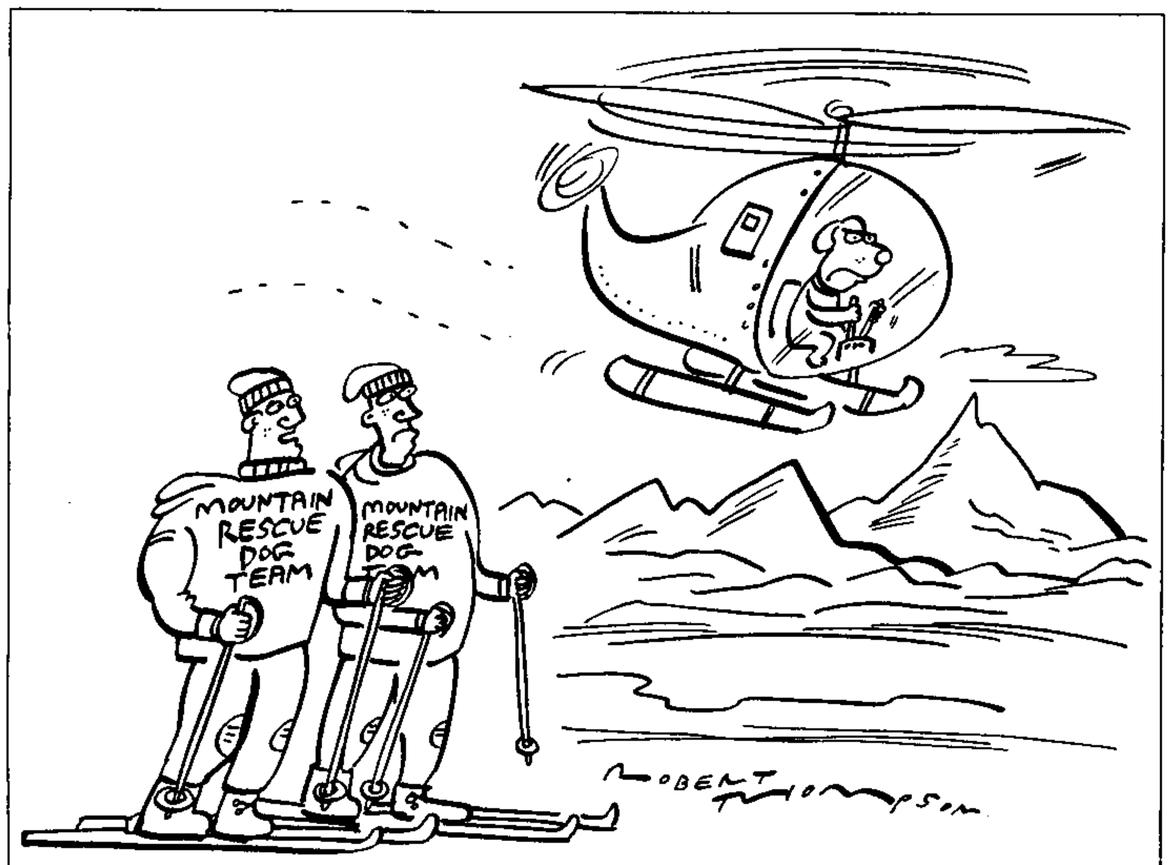
Said one angry first-time buyer, Mr Madeupname, 43, "Why would I want to buy a house that is so cheap that I can afford it? How will I make millions of pounds that way? It makes no sense. I would rather be homeless and live in a cardboard box".

Mr Madeupname, speaking from the desk next to mine in the Daily Mail office, took time off in his lunch hour to tell me, "Gordon Brown should resign at once and so should the rest of the government. Vote Conservative."

On Other Pages

Does Sudoku Give You Cancer? **94**

"What do you think? Less intimidating?"



"Blimey! He's good..."

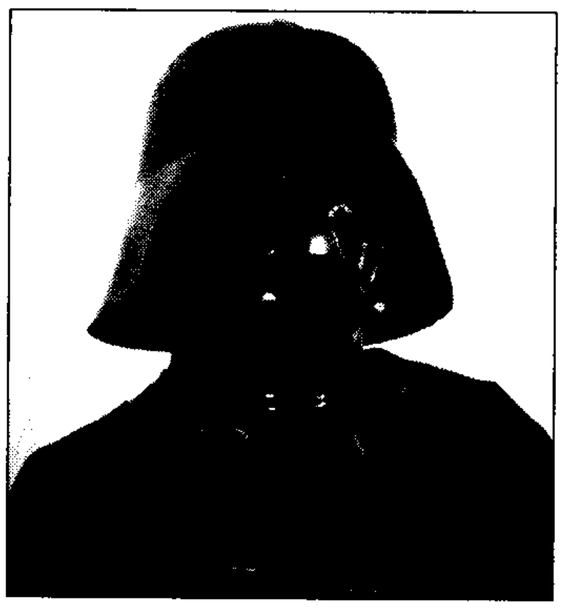
NEW CRONY ROW ROCKS LABOUR

by Our Political Staff
Luke Skynews

ACCUSATIONS of 'cronyism' were being thrown around the Galaxy last night as it emerged that Anakin Skywalker had been made Lord Vader solely because he was a friend of Tony Blair.

Rumours that Annekin Skywalker had donated a large cheque to the Imperial fighting fund shortly before being ennobled were hotly denied by a spokesman for Lord Vader, Mr Sith.

Said Mr Sith, "Lord Vader was given the title on merit. Just as he was given the contract to



Lord Vader

create a clone army to wipe out the universe. It is nothing to do with rewarding favours."

OBE-Wan Kenobi

A spokesman for Mr Blair added, "This is a very old story. It all happened a long, long time ago in a galaxy far, far away".

A long-time critic of Lord Vader, Mr Yoda, added, "To the dark side, Tony Blair has gone".

POLLY FILLER

Pregnancy Diary

In the first of a series of extracts from her new book Give Me The Mummy!, *Polly Filler chronicles her sometimes hilarious but always moving struggle to have a baby.*

WE always knew, from the first time we went to the doctor, that we were going to have problems.

There we were, the useless Simon and I, in the surgery, when our GP opened the test results. It was my worst fear. "Polly," he said kindly, "there's nothing wrong with you or Simon. You'll probably have a baby immediately."

My heart pounded. How was I going to make a whole book out of my pregnancy problems? The opportunity of producing a soul-searching yet humorous account of my fertility woes had been cruelly snatched away from me.

As tears streamed down my face, the doctor coolly sat us down and went through the options.

He suggested that during my "fertility windows" the useless Simon should spend more time watching Celebrity Chelsea Tractor Racing from Sloane Square, presented by A.A. Clarkson and Jeremy Gill, to make sure that he wasn't in the mood for sexual intercourse at the right time in my cycle!

And, if things got desperate and I was *really* in the mood, Simon had to be prepared to hop on his moped and travel to the other side of town to play five-a-side football with his mates, so there was no possible danger of premature conception.

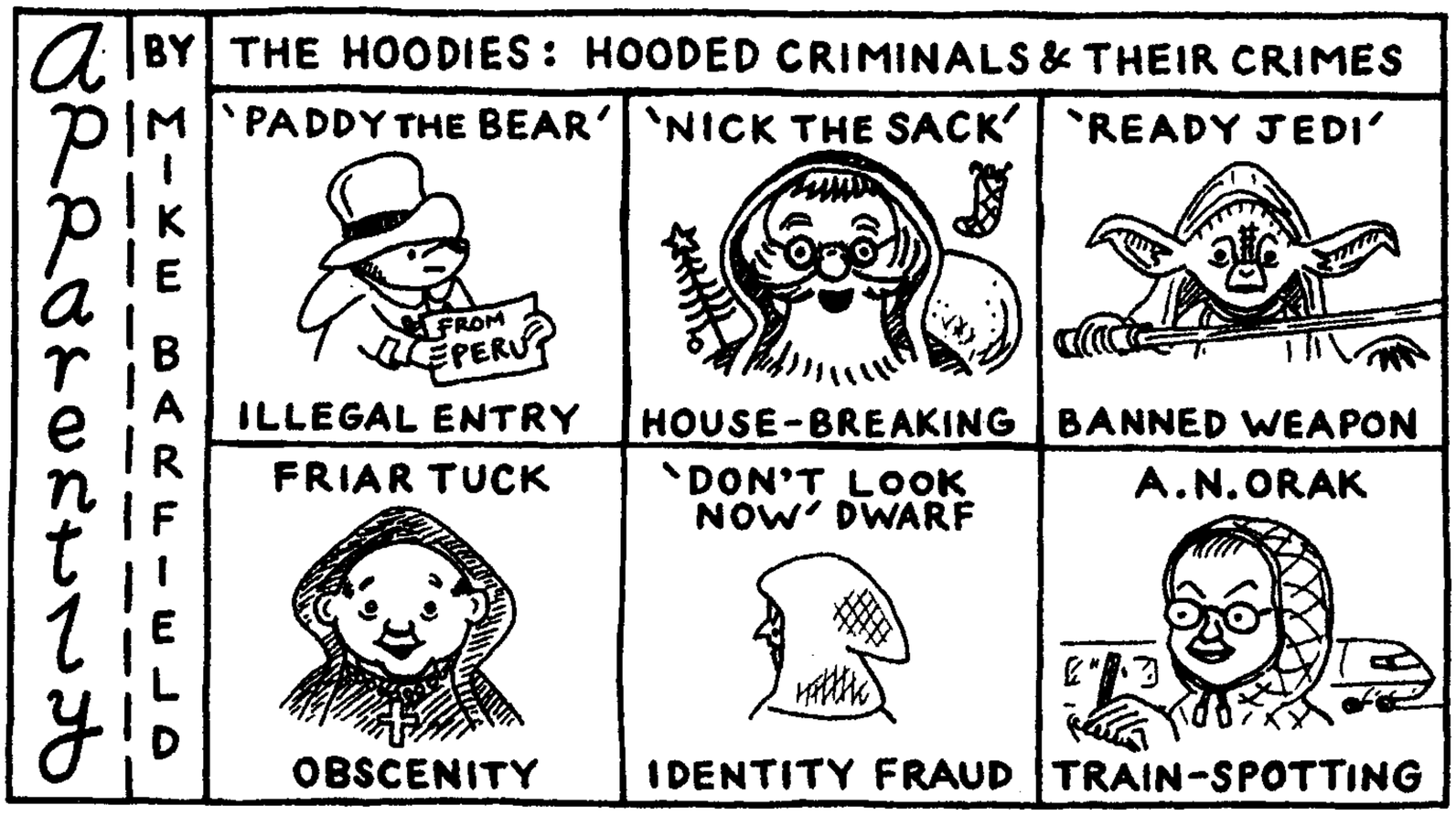
NINE months later – success! Out popped my book, weighing in at a healthy seven pounds (and ninety-nine pence!), charting in excruciating gynaecological detail the trials and tribulations of our efforts at conception.

And, you know what was the most painful part of the whole gory process? Writing the foreword where I tried to justify the book on the grounds that millions of ordinary women saw me as a role model and I thought that it would help them in their own pregnancies! Ouch! Still, it was all worth it!

As my partner, the useless Simon always says, "It's Pukka Chekka!" and "Lovely Lolly".

TOMORROW: Polly and Simon go through exactly the same things as everyone else when they have a baby.

© Polly Filler, The Daily Telegraph, the Daily Mail etc etc.



BUSH WARNS UZBEKISTAN

by Our Diplomatic Staff **Hugh Sless**

THE White House today warned the government of Uzbekistan that if it continued to ruthlessly oppress dissent following the slaughter of hundreds of unarmed protestors by Government troops that the US would have no alternative but to "stand by and do nothing".

"However, our good friend, President Islam Karimov, should be aware that should he change his name by deed poll to Saddam Hussein, then we would immediately invade to free the oppressed people from their evil dictatorial leader and bring about immediate regime change," said President... *(cont. p. 94)*

Duchess of Love

by DAME SYLVIE KRIN, author of *La Dame Aux Camillas*, *Heir of Sorrows*, and *Born To Be Queen Consort.*

THE STORY SO FAR: Prince Charles has whisked off his new bride to a luxury post-nuptial cruise in the Aegean.

Now read on...

"HOW blue the sky is," purred Camilla, "and how warm the sun," she added, as she reclined on a lounger on the polished wooden deck of the 600-foot ocean-going yacht King Midas, the flagship of the fleet owned by the Greek billionaire philanthropist Stavros Taxlos.

"Doesn't Highgrove seem like another world?" she went on, as her gaze lingered on the gambolling dolphins, as they sported alongside the sleek, white hull of the world's largest and most opulent yacht, as it sliced its way through the azure main.

Camilla couldn't remember ever being so happy in all her life. This surely was the honeymoon she had dreamed of for so long. Just her and the man she loved, cocooned on this floating island of love – and all alone, apart from the 400 members of Mr Taxlos's attentive crew, supervised by their charismatic and bearded captain, Doner Kebab.

"Would Your Highness care for an aperitif?" purred an olive-skinned steward at her elbow. "Could I recommend a glass of the local *taki*? It is delicious."

"Yes, thanks, that sounds terrific. And could I have another pack of these Euripides untipped?"

She lit a cigarette and gazed happily across at her beloved husband, as he sat doggedly at his easel, attempting a water-colour of the idyllic scene unfolding below them.

"Very difficult to do, these dolphins," he called out. "They keep moving. As soon as you think you've got one, it goes back in the water."

Camilla pulled her House of Hurley floral sarong round her waist, as she strolled over to inspect the incipient masterpiece.

"I think it's really good, Chazza. You've really got those clouds awfully well," she said encouragingly.

"Well, no, those are the waves actually," he replied, a faint note of impatience creeping into his voice.

"As long as you're happy, Chazza. That's what matters. And, just think, we've got two whole weeks together. No telephone calls from your mother. No boring speeches to make. None of those ghastly photographers following us around everywhere. Just the two of us..."

THE evening sun was sinking into the sea like a giant, orange ball, as the King Midas glided gracefully into the picturesque little fishing harbour beneath the towering shadow of Mount Bathos.

From the waterfront, Camilla could hear the enticing strains of a sudoko player strumming some lively folk tunes, while the smells of the traditional local dish, *mouskori*, rose from glowing charcoal braziers.

On the quayside, a gnarled old fisherman was playing a traditional, local game of backgammon on his mobile phone.

Camilla leaned over the rail, drinking it all in. And there was the little tender coming alongside, ready to take them ashore to savour all these wonderful sights and sounds in what promised to be a perfect end to a perfect day.

But what was this?

Charles was standing at the head of the gangway, dressed in a sombre grey suit, carrying his overnight bag.

"What are you doing, Chazza? I thought we were going ashore?"

"Well, not exactly. Didn't I mention it? Only, I've arranged to go on a kind of retreat thingie in the monastery here. I'll only be gone for a week or so.

"And they'll look after you awfully well on the ship..."

Camilla reeled, as though struck by a lightning bolt hurled down from Olympus itself.

"What the hell do you think you're doing, Charles? I thought this was meant to be our honeymoon."

Charles stammered a reply. "It is. But, you know, a chap's got to have some space to himself, to sort of think things through."

Camilla was speechless, anger and hurt welling up in her sun-kissed embonpoint, as Charles stumbled on in a feeble attempt to justify himself.

"It's all in that wonderful book *Me And My Shadow Self* by my old friend Sir Laurens – *'The more you are apart, the more you are together'*. How very true that is, don't you think, when you sort of think about it?"

And with that he was gone, down into the darkness, leaving her with only the silvery orb of the rising moon for company.

Didn't those old Greeks believe that Diana was the goddess of the moon?

And was that the faint echo of a woman's laughter that she could hear from the Elysian fields?

Even on that warm Mediterranean night she felt a Stygian chill clutching at her heart.

(To be continued)

© Sylvie Krin, the Ryanair No-Frills Romance Collection 2005

ROY of the GLAZERS
MELCHESTER UNITED HAVE BEEN BOUGHT UP BY SINISTER AMERICAN TYCOON MALCOLM GLAZER AND THE FANS AREN'T HAPPY
HE'S OVER-PAID, OVER-STRETCHED AND OVER HERE!
COME ON YOU IN THE REDS!
NO TO GLAZER
ROONEY
8
FERDINAND
5
DON'T WORRY EVERYONE. I'M GOING TO CONTINUE ALL THE GREAT TRADITIONS OF THE CLUB
I'M GOING TO RIP THE FANS OFF AND MAKE LOTS OF MONEY!
BACK OF THE NET PROFIT!
IT'S A GNOME WIN!
FINANCIAL GOAL!
J COOPER

Queen's Speech

BLAIR'S ASTONISHING FINAL LEGACY

Those 94 Bills which will guarantee Blair's place in the history books.

Retirement Homes Bill

The Government will take steps to ensure that in future all old people's homes will be required to install stairlifts, even if they are bungalows.

The Road Safety (Amendment) Bill

Anyone caught smoking while at the wheel of a car, even if it is stationary, will be liable to an on-the-spot fine of £1000, or 100 hours of community service.

The Maternity Benefit Extension Bill

A Bill to entitle single women without children to claim maternity benefit.

The Protection of Landlords and Civil Disturbances Bill

A Bill to entitle landlords the right to refuse to sell drink to customers whose clear aim is to become intoxicated.

The Sandwich Board Bill

The Government is to set up a new agency to regulate the size, shape and content of sandwiches (not including baguettes).

The Prohibition of Canine Waste Bill

Magistrates will be empowered to imprison all dogs found fouling public spaces (not including cemeteries) where their owners have not acted promptly to remove the offending material (15 mins max Monday to Friday 7am – 7pm).

The Tree and Shrub Registration Bill

Householders occupying domestic premises will be required to register with their local authority any tree or shrub growing on their land above a height of 3.2 metres (3mm for bonsai species).

The Incitement to Hatred of Blunkett Bill

A Bill to make it a criminal offence to criticise or in any way defame the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions or to impugn his integrity in such a way as to bring him into public ridicule. The penalty for this offence shall be death.

Anti-Social Behaviour Order (Extension) Bill

The following new offences will be made subject to the imposition of an ASBO:

1. The use of skateboards in hospital car parks.

2. The dropping of ring-pulls from drink cans in a public place.

3. The offering of Turkey Twizzlers to a minor.

4. Over-encouragement of urban pigeons by providing them with seed or other edible foodstuffs in excess of 1 kilogram.

5. The erection of a windfarm in a private garden without planning permission.

6. The use of personal stereo equipment in a place of worship in such a way as to inconvenience other members of the congregation.

7. The emission of excessive noise from the act of turning the pages of a book or periodical in bed while your partner is trying to sleep.

The Miscellaneous Provisions Bill

A Bill to abolish Magna Carta, the NHS, trial by jury, habeas corpus, state schools, etc.

THE DAILY SUDOKU

INTRODUCING a new feature into your Daily Sudoku that will soon have you gripped! Yes, it's **Nustori** an ancient idea in which the newspaper prints a news story rather than another puzzle!

The exciting Nustori feature appears on page 94 of your best-selling Sudoku with an introduction by Nustori Grand Master Max Hastings, which explains how to get the most out of a news story in those boring twenty minutes when you've done all the puzzles. Says Max "I took one look at Nustori and now I'm hooked!"

You'll find Nustori after Elementary Sudoku and Classic Sudoku and just before Fiendish and Impossible Sudoku.

Don't miss the Nustori craze that will soon be sweeping the nation!!

● *Solution to original Sudoku No. 94. There are 732948651 puzzles in today's Daily Sudoku.*

CANDIDATES FOR CONSERVATIVE RACE MAKES THEMSELVES KNOWN

GLENDA SLAGG

AN OPEN LETTER TO PIXIE AND PEACHES GELDOF

Dear Peachy and Pixies,

As a close personal friend of the family, I am deeply concerned at the way you young girls are turning out. I read that you're on the town every night in clubs and bars instead of staying at home and studying for your exams.

And I'm worried too by the company you are keeping – the photos of you with Z-list celebrities like Tara Rara-Boomdeeay send a cold shiver down my spine!

I love both of you dearly and deeply but you are in danger of turning from little English Roses into ghastly slappers just like your mother – God rest her soul!

Your father Sir Bob is one of my best friends and won't mind me saying that as a parent he is a bloody disgrace who should be strung up whilst you two are taken into care for your own good!

You know how much your Auntie Glenda cares for you and you also know that if I didn't care so much I wouldn't write this open letter slagging you off publicly in exchange for a very large sum of money.

Yours, concerned,
GLENDA.

Very Late News

Sheriff of Nottingham to outlaw Robin Hoodie *by Piers 'Ye Moron' Plowman*

Ye Sheriff of Nottingham hath vowed to (cont 1194)

WHO ARE THESE MEN?
Please help us, say Police

by Our Missing Persons Staff **Lunchtime Noclooze**

POLICE ARE baffled by the appearance of a group of men who have been found washed up in the South of England and who do not seem to know who they are.

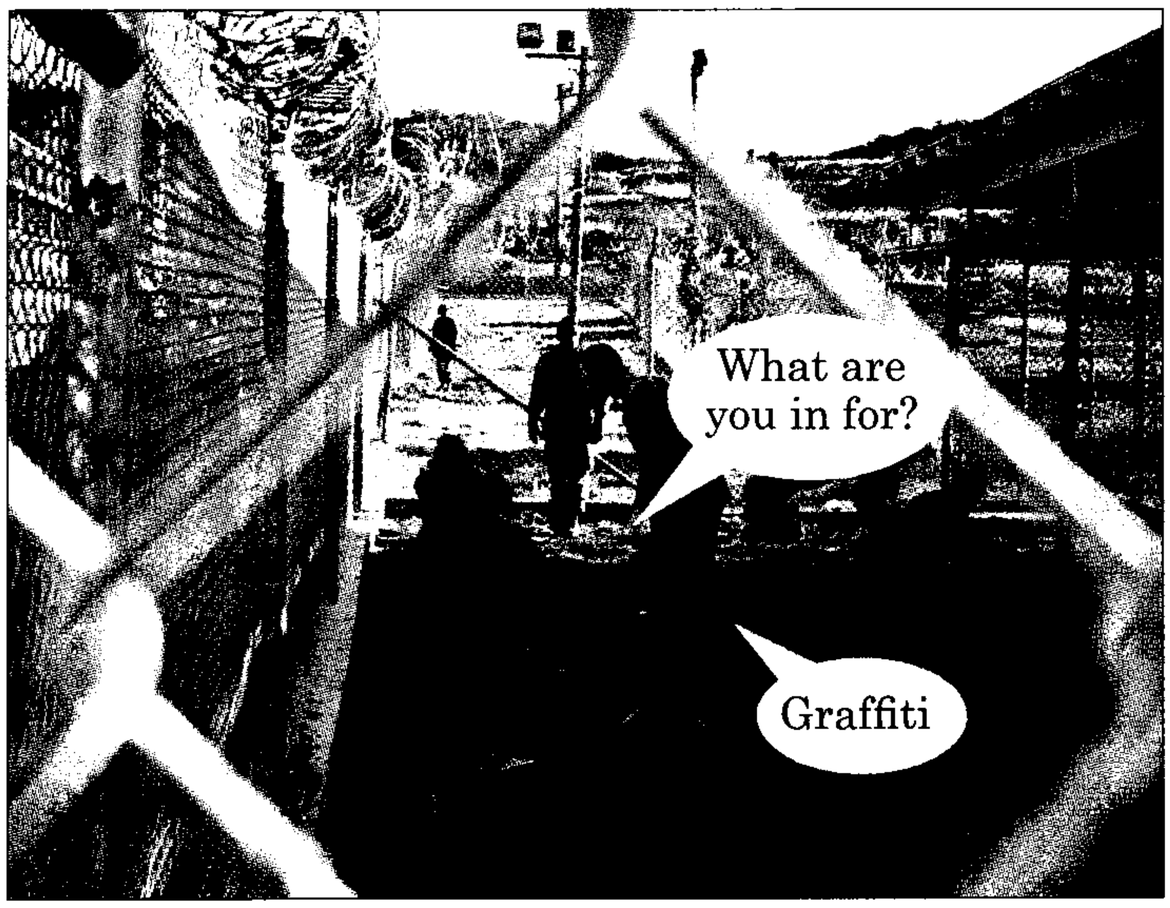
Dressed in dark suits, the men have vacant expressions and when asked to speak cower away as if terrified of human contact.

Oliver Halfwit

One suggestion is that these lost souls are Tory MPs, suffering from a severe identity crisis following some traumatic incident on 5 May.

Psychiatrists and social workers have spent many hours with the mystery men.

"We suspect that they are of limited intelligence," said one. "They cannot even play the piano."



BLUNKETT TO BE FAST-TRACKED TO SAINTHOOD

by Our Man In The Vatican **Lunchtime O'Pus-Dei**

THE newly elected Pope, Antonio I, yesterday confirmed that he had fast-tracked a blind holy man, the Blessed Blunkett, to instant sainthood.

Traditionalists protested that the Blessed Blunkett did not meet the strict conditions for sainthood laid down by the Church.

One important disadvantage is that the bearded English mystic (surely 'misfit'? Ed) is still alive, whereas it has hitherto been a rule that a saint must be dead.

Shock

But supporters of his claim to sanctity point out that Blunkett was kind to dogs, married women and children, many of whom he claimed were his own.

Most important of all, critics point out that saints are required to have performed at least two genuine miracles, and claim that there is no evidence of Blunkett having performed the necessary supernatural acts.

Spokesmen for Pope Blairnedict the 94th insist, however, that the Blessed Blunkett has indeed performed two astonishing and fully attested miracles in the past few months alone.

Firstly, he has got his job back in the Cabinet. And, secondly, he has managed to make Charles Clarke look like a halfway competent Home Secretary.

Lines written by the Rt Hon David Blunkett MP on his reappointment as a Cabinet Minister with responsibilty for the Child Support Agency.

Labour is red,
The Tories are blue.
I've got my job back,
So sod all of you.

D. Blunkett, The People's Poet
(17½ lovechildren)

—LITTLE RED RIDING HOODIE—

My eBay

nosfera (2)

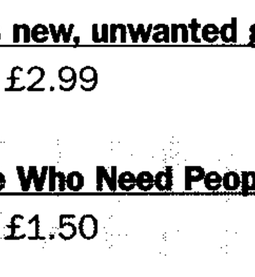
Items I'm Bidding On (1-3 of 3 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ **"Standfast" security system – protect your home from intruders**	£49.99	£12.99	1
☐ **"London By Night" guidebook, slightly soiled**	£1.99	£1.00	1
☐ **"Get To Know Your Garden" – 800 pp, 2 vols**	£15.99	£4.50	1

Items I'm Selling (1-3 of 3 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ **Garlic press, as new, unwanted gift**	£2.99	£2.00	0
☐ **"People, People Who Need People" – B. Streisand single, slight distort**	£1.50	£1.00	0
☐ **Mind-reading Game – amaze your friends, guess what they're thinking!**	£5.99	£3.00	0

SALLY JOCKSTRAP
The Voice Of Sport



THE great summer of sport starts here! The Grand Prix kicked off to a great start when Wayne Rooney scored the winning run at the Curragh in a nail-biting 18th hole finish.

● *SPARE a thought for the English Lions facing the awesome Bangladeshis as they bring their strongest ever side to Wimbledon. Will Frankie Dettori make the difference at prop-half or are we doomed to losing the Admiral's Cup – AGAIN!*

● IT'S definitely Tim Henman's year. We've been disappointed before but this year as he leads Manchester United out onto the hallowed turf of the Belfry, my money is on Tiger Woods and his Ferrari team to bring the Ashes home!

© *Sally Jockstrap*

EUROVISION SONG CONTEST
Late Result

CHINA has won the Eurovision Song Contest with its surprise winning song, "We hate Western Europe".The British entry for the first time received a negative number of votes, scoring a disappointing -94, putting the UK second to bottom, just above France.

THE Sun SAYS

THE news that Malcolm Glazer has been allowed to take a controlling share in Manchester United is one that naturally will horrify all Sun readers, who will be appalled by the fact that an American citizen with no real knowledge of day-to-day life in Britain can be allowed to get away with buying the Sun *(Surely 'Manchester United'? Ed.).*

How can an American like Mr Murdoch *(Surely Mr Glazer? Ed.)*, who pays no taxes in this country and who will almost certainly treat the fans with contempt, be allowed to turn this symbol of Britain abroad into his own personal cash cow for Sky TV *(You're fired. Rupert)*.

SUN-DOKU!

THE fiendishly hard new puzzle that's gripping the whole nation – specially adapted for our readers. Remember all the numbers from 1 to 9 must be placed in the box. Happy puzzling!

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	

BLAIR DECLARES WAR ON 'HOODIES'

The Daily Telegraph

BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING QUALITY DAILY Friday, May 27, 2005

Galloway Humiliated At Senate Hearing – 'MP Clearly Guilty' Says Everyone

By Our Washington Staff Lunchtime O'Bias

THE controversial MP for Bethnal Green, Mr George Galloway, suffered a devastating reverse yesterday in front of a distinguished group of American senators.

The pathetic Galloway, when confronted by the razor-sharp questioning of New Dworkin senator Kermit Moosejaw, could only speak for twenty minutes without notes while listing the errors in Mr Moosejaw's report.

So feeble was the MP's self-justification that the senators could only listen in silence, occasionally breaking down and weeping, as Mr Galloway proved that they had copied the whole report out of the Daily Telegraph.

ON OTHER PAGES

Senator Moosejaw: Will this brilliant advocate be the next President of the United States? **2** Will Galloway have to kill himself after this debacle? **3**

PLUS!

Sudailytelegraph

The fiendish new game where you sue us for huge sums of money. Just fill in the numbers!

£	9	9	9	9	9	9

the PREMIERSH*TS

PAUL WOOLF
ALL I'M SAYING IS THAT GLAZER BETTER WATCH HIS BACK
ANOTHER LAGER DAVE?
BURGER VA
THINK OF IT, MANCHESTER UTD OWNED BY A YANK!
KETCHUP DAVE?
EVEN HIS SISTERS DON'T TALK TO HIM...
COP SCUM!
BUT WORST OF ALL...
HOUSE-BRICK DAVE?
THE TWAT DOESNT EVEN LIKE SPORT!
DID YOU CATCH THE SCORE DAVE?

EXCLUSIVE TO ALL PAPERS

FAMOUS WOMAN HAS CANCER

On Other Pages

- Pictures of the famous woman who has cancer with less famous boyfriend who doesn't have cancer **2-17**
- Pictures of famous woman in skimpy tops **18-37**
- Pictures of millions of other women who aren't famous with cancer *(cancelled due to lack of space)*

PLUS

- 'I've Had It Too' by lots of female journalists **37-63**
- 'What Happens When Famous People Get Cancer' by Dr Thomas Utterfraud **94**

Late News

ROYAL MAIL 'RECORD PROFIT'

THE Royal Mail says its record profit of £537 million in the last financial year was as a direct result of phasing out outdated working practices such as "delivering letters on time".

"Obviously, back at the turn of the century, practices such as this were commonplace," said the Royal Mail's chief executive Adam Crozier, "but in the 21st Century, Britain we've a modern diversified company that has no time for delivering letters."

Post Office staff are expected to receive details of a one-off bonus payment in a letter that'll be posted in the next few weeks and should get to them by 2014.

The Royal Mail is 17 (months away from privatisation).

MEDIA UPDATE

A MAGAZINE that was supposed to give £1m to another magazine that had given £1m to a famous man and a famous woman who wanted to be photographed on their wedding day by the second magazine but not the first because that would have been an invasion of their privacy has been told it doesn't have to and that the second magazine now has to give it £3m.

DIARY

I do this trick with my knuckles. From an early age, I have been able to click them quite loudly. I like to do this while the current Prime Minister is giving us the benefit of his opinions. It helps me concentrate on what truly matters.

From time to time, the current Prime Minister has sent messages via envoys asking me to curtail my knuckle-clicking while he is speaking. I reply in a most friendly and courteous manner, via a senior member of my staff, that clicking my knuckles from time to time has helped me produce one of the most dynamic economies in the world. I even offer to teach him to click his knuckles.

Perhaps it might help him regain the 60-odd seats we lost owing to his personal unpopularity in last month's General Election, I quip!

THE RT HON
GORDON BROWN

As this amusing anecdote makes clear, my relationship with Mr Blair remains cordial, contrary to the ill-informed tittle-tattle of the rumour-mongers.

He does his job; I do mine.

I am happy to leave it to others to decide which of us does the better job!

I know Mr Blair would join me in saying that the success of this Labour government lies in our handling of the economy. I know, too, that, as an experienced politician of proven something-or-other, he would agree with me that it is easy enough to fly around the world glad-handing Presidents and Potentates and grinning like a ninny. And he'd be the first to agree, too, that building a modern, prosperous economy is a far more difficult task, best left to a political heavyweight.

May I add that I fully support Mr Blair's decision to use our Cabinet meetings to go on and on about all his little achievements. Me and George this, me and Vladimir that. Fair enough. And I know, too, that he welcomes the simultaneous commentary – often mildly irreverent! – that I issue under my breath.

"Get a fucking move on!" I might quip, or "Shut the fuck up!" And sometimes when he is addressing one of his needless instructions in my direction, I stick a finger in each ear and say, "La la la la la la la, I can't hear you, Tony!"

It has always been the role of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to support, and, where necessary, undercut the sitting Prime Minister. Undoubtedly, a Prime Minister of any worth should welcome interjections, however outspoken, made by his senior Cabinet colleague. So yesterday, when Mr Blair said, "Gordon, perhaps you could remind us of the projected rate of growth for 2007," and I put on my baby voice and said, "Gwordon, pewhaps oo could wemind us of the pwojected wate of gwofe for two fwowsand and seven", I was aware that my interjection had greatly amused those of my colleagues who share my belief in Labour's core values, and had done much to strengthen the atmosphere of unity towards me in Cabinet.

Contrary to rumours and speculation, I see the current Prime Minister on a regular basis. Indeed, I have had a secret spy-hole inserted in my office just for that very purpose.

Sometimes, when I judge the economy to be running smoothly, I like to relax by standing on a sturdy chair and peering through my spy-hole. And they say I have no hobbies! I have been portrayed by those working against me in the media as a statesman with little or no inclination towards humour. To those Blairites, I would say this: if you could see the Chancellor at his little spy-hole on a Friday evening or a Saturday morning – or just about any evening or morning in the week – you would form a very different impression, for here is a man much given to mirth!

Only the other day, I was peeking through my spy-hole, watching little Tony busying away at his desk, trying to make himself seem important, when who should enter his room but Cherie. "Here comes trouble!" I muttered under my breath – and sure enough she started going on about how their family goldfish had been poisoned, and what was Tony going to do about it. Tony started telling her she was being paranoid, and then all hell broke loose!

You have to chuckle, don't you? I stood there, smiling to myself, quietly fingering the teat-pipette in my jacket pocket. Yet his dwindling band of supporters continue to put it about that I have no sense of humour!

I worry about Blair's slipped disc. If Tony were to die tomorrow – and I only say 'if' – then it would fall to me to lead the nation in mourning. Jack Straw is discredited, Charles Clarke is over-promoted and John Prescott is simply not up to the task.

No need for anything lavish or overblown. That's not what he would have wanted. And I think the public would appreciate a small-scale affair. A tribute from his old headmaster, perhaps, a few tears from Cherie, then a hymn or two and an efficient burial, handled with the minimum of fuss. If called upon, I might tearfully recall the time he handed me a dripping ice-cream in the middle of the election. "It was typical of the man's generosity," I would say, reaching for my handkerchief. It wouldn't be the time or the place to say that I've never liked ice-cream and he bloody knew I bloody didn't.

Of course, one would be duty-bound to ride out the wave of public grief, if any. Needless to say, his untimely death would render any sort of leadership contest out of the question. Far more dignified, in the circumstances, for the Labour Party to rally round an obvious successor. I would accept the mantle with humility. I might even pay a brief tribute to my predecessor. No need to mention his name, I think. Forward, not back: it's the way he would have wanted it.

Prime Minister Brown. It has a nice, confident ring to it. "You must take as long as you want to remove all your things from Number 10," I would say, compassionately, to Mrs Blair. "But frankly it would suit us to have you out by the weekend." Having finished saying my piece, I'd open my mouth. It's long been the way I signal that things are improving, and that everything's on course to give this country the sort of strong, confident leadership it so desperately requires.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

SO DEBS, OUR READERS WANT TO KNOW HOW DO YOU KEEP YOUR YOUTHFUL-LOOKING FACE?
WELL, I'VE BEEN BLESSED WITH A GOOD COMPLEXION AND YOUNG SKIN I SUPPOSE. I ALSO DRINK LOTS OF WATER...
DO YOU USE AN ANTI-WRINKLE FACE CREAM?
NO. THEY'RE A TOTAL WASTE OF MONEY.
I USE AN INTENSIVE WRINKLE CORRECTING ANTI CREASING SERUM.

Literary Review

Going for bloke

A Long Way Down
Nick Hornby
(Viking Penguin, £17.99)

The Seymour Tapes
Tim Lott
(Viking Penguin, £12.99)

LADIES and gentlemen, Ottaker's browsers all, allow me to introduce a couple of superior exponents of the modern middle-aged bloke novel.

On my left here is amiable and presentable late-fortysomething Nick, from Highbury, whose fourth novel this is. On my right is the equally amiable and presentable late-fortysomething Tim, from Willesden is it, whose fourth novel this is too.

Each has an enviable profile though Nick, I should imagine, earns 10 times as much as Tim. Still it would be idle to deny that their preoccupations and constituencies aren't, well, *similar*.

As to provenance, the origins of the modern bloke novel – a category not altogether to be despised, in case you think I'm about to turn all sniffy – go back at least as far as 1989, when Simon Nye produced his modest Penguin paperback original try-out for *Men Behaving Badly*. In fact the ensuing tide of sad, ground-down mid-90s male humanity could generally be goaded into behaving reasonably well, but here the seeds of the genre were sown. The route might wind off into IKEA showrooms (Mike Gayle) or veer down into tabloid land (Tony Parsons) but the subject was the same: the bloke, in all his tarnished glory: dim, quiescent, getting into all kinds of scrapes with the ladies, natch, but ultimately redeemable.

Writing about blokes, of course, usually means you end up writing about girls as well (Nick, in particular, made this a fail-safe feature of his approach). Given these fatal alliances, in which the best of us are ultimately tamed and led off to Habitat, the eventual targets – huge amounts of rueful comedy notwithstanding – were always going to get pretty serious. At any rate *A Long Way Down* and *The Seymour Tapes* contain four failed suicide attempts and a horrific death between them.

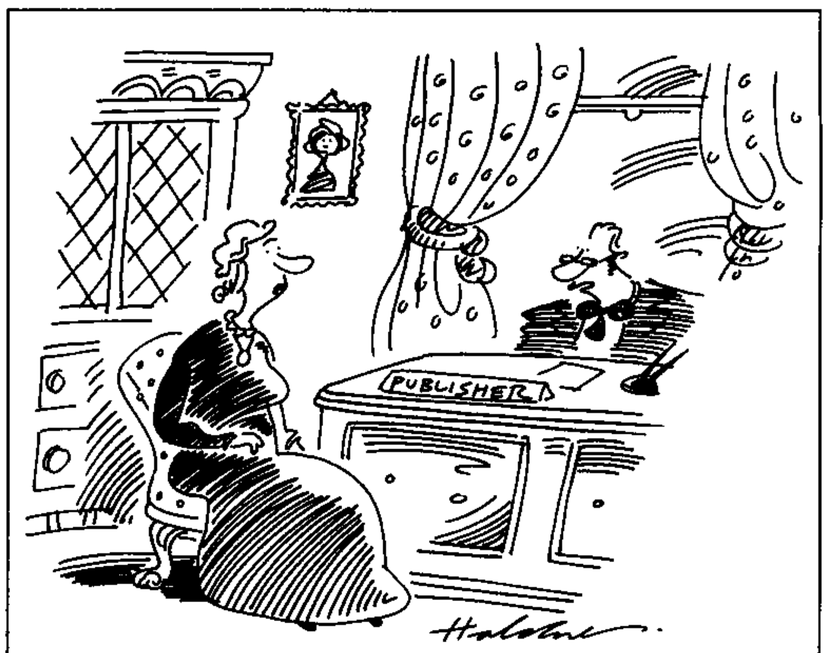
Nick's effort is about a party of potential self-destructors – middle-aged Maureen, scandal-shattered TV presenter Martin, teen horror Jess and American cool-epitome JJ – who meet on top of a tower block but opt to stick around for each other instead. Tim's, on the other hand, is a posthumous framing of the ghastly demise of a paranoid north London GP named Alex Seymour (dear me, the symbolism of it all) who sets off a series of unfortunate events by installing CCTV in his home.

As you'll have gathered by now, plausibility isn't these lads' strongpoint. Neither is any feeling that the world outside London even exists: the bloke novel has always been profoundly metropolitan (Essex doesn't count as "country" by the way, all you Parsons fans.) As for the treatment, another feature of the genre is its reluctance to invent very much and its hankering to return to the personality of the chap who wrote it. Nick, for example, is still dropping in arch references to Arsenal FC and books he has enthused about elsewhere, while each of the four contending voices is actually the Hornby voice from his earlier books slightly re-jigged for its current outing.

Tim, meanwhile, has the neat idea of pretending that his novel is a case report compiled by "Tim Lott", who can be found interviewing the survivors and at one point bargaining for information from Seymour's widow with details of his own private life.

Serious stuff, of course, although occasionally compromised by the jokiness that's endemic to this kind of thing.

Moving on to where this duly acclaimed twosome stand in relation to the form that sustains them, any genre finds itself prey to stylisation after a while and the modern bloke novel, at this late stage in its trajectory, is turning very stylised indeed, as predictable and unstartling in its way as anything from higher up the market by messrs McEwan and Ishiguro.



"We need to raise your profile, Miss Austen. Have you considered celebrity wrestling?

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS Pt 94

Penguin Special: The Life of Allen Lane
Jeremy Lewis
(Viking, £25)

...If office life at this period grew ever more Byzantine, then Lane's ambition to back new ideas remained as fresh and ardent as ever. As his perhaps over bonhomous subordinate Barrington ("Barry") Dulle ("the empties" his secretary would meaningfully remark) whose *Times* obituary described him as "a small, silent, inconspicuous man with a laconic telephone manner", and was thought to come from Dursley in Gloucestershire remembered "AL was always on the look-out for books to publish. In fact it was one of the distinctive things about him."

It was while lunching at the Questing Vole, the Soho restaurant of which *Time and Tide's* food critic observed some years before that "it offers a perfectly acceptable three-course meal for two shillings and sixpence, with coffee included" that Lane, pictured here together with Dulle and his loyal associates Winifred Carp (?), [Unknown] and Lawrence Minion (without monocle), devised one of his master strokes: the hiring of Olaf Kent-Cumberland, a benign, granite-hewn character keen on home-made jam, eurhythmy and haiku, of which he was a nimble practitioner, to edit a list of what he described as "rather good books that may not inconsiderably remunerate us".

Hailed by *Publisher's World*, then operating from an obscure mews in Knightsbridge not far from the flat inhabited by Cyril Connolly in the early winter of 1934, "not at all a bad idea in principle", Kent-Cumberland's first offerings included Evadne Clerkenwell's controversial novel *Bedpost Confidential* (124,568 copies) and Brigadier Gervase Frobisher's *The Chiff-Chaff in his Natural Habitat* (245,879). Lane commented that "Kent-Cumberland is really most encouraged by the reception and I share his sense of gratification."

Meanwhile, the summit of Lane's meteoric career loomed before the firm, with his courageous decision to risk prosecution by publishing Barbara Bedworthy's erotic masterpiece *It's Nicer Lying Down*. At the trial, presided over by Mr Justice Verdant-Green, whose son Cecil Lane had known as a keen motor-bicyclist in the 1920s... [continues for thousands of pages]

LIBRARY NEWS

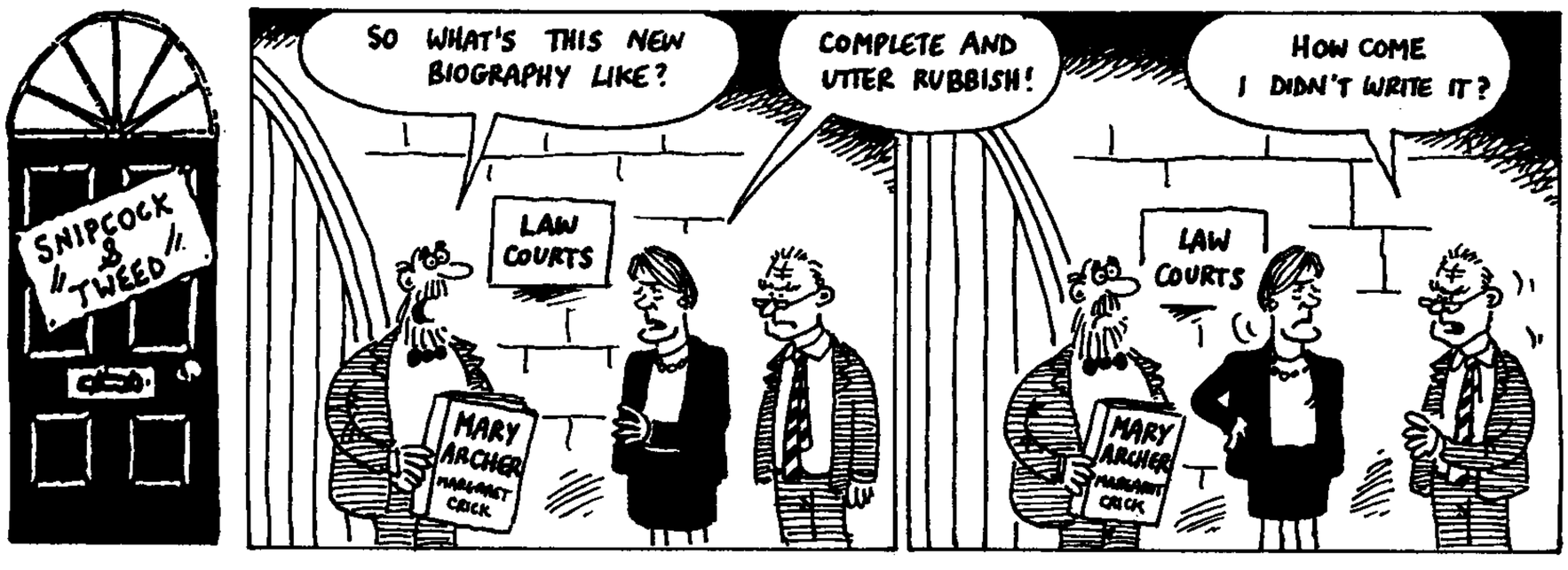
■ "IN THE last month the 1,200 desks in 11 reading rooms have been virtually full on a daily basis," announced the British Library, proudly revealing that the number of people applying for reader passes has doubled in the past year and the number of collection items consulted is up 20 percent.

As lovely as it may be that the library is popular, the level of use does bring some major disadvantages. Natalie Creeney, director of operations and services, may pronounce herself delighted that an "average of only five to ten seats" are available, but researchers with nowhere to sit are less pleased, especially those wanting to use rare texts that can only be used in a specific reading room which may well be completely full.

The speed at which books can be fetched from stores, and therefore the maximum number of requests allowed per researcher, also drop when the library is that packed.

So why the rise in research? Well, during 2004 the library "streamlined" its application process to "make it more straightforward for researchers from all backgrounds to use the library". In the past, people asking about reader passes were advised to try other sources, such as their local public library, first, making the BL a library of last resort. Now the BL's mission statement simply says: "If you are doing research, and the British Library's collections could help you, you are welcome to come and use the Library."

Things are likely to worsen in the next few months as the academic summer break is normally the peak time for the library.



Books & Bookmen

■ A BIG exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum next month celebrates the magnificence of Penguin Books.

"The display will show how Penguin has responded to – and influenced – changing trends in British culture," gushes the blurb. "Since 1935 each Penguin book cover has perfectly captured the culture of its time."

All most gratifying for Dame Marjorie Scardino, chief executive of Penguin's parent company, the Pearson Group. By happy coincidence, Dame Marjorie also sits on the board of trustees at... the Victoria and Albert Museum.

■ READERS of the *TLS* may have been puzzled last week to find a three-page extract from *Nothing to Be Afraid Of*, the new novel by one Will Eaves.

Why should this venerable publication suddenly bestow an accolade normally reserved for Updikes and Bellows on an unknown writer? Answer: he is the arts editor of the *TLS*.

Eaves's shameless self-promotion doesn't stop there. He emailed 100 *TLS* contributors and other acquaintances with the following exhortation: "I need you to go to your local bookshop and order a copy... You might then consider buying a copy for a friend, or indeed an enemy."

As he concludes: "I hope you all know that I wouldn't be writing this letter if I could think of another way... But I can't. I am, in fact, counting on you." Has he by any chance taken Toby Young's correspondence course?

■ WHAT exactly was Mary Archer hoping to achieve by jetting to New York to plead with Simon & Schuster's Jack Romanos not to publish Margaret Crick's biography of her?

After her attempt to grab Crick's research materials under the data protection act failed, did she think her fragrance would intoxicate Romanos into ditching a major publishing investment at the eleventh hour?

In doing so she has only given a great story with which to promote the book and the impression that there's something in it she very badly wants suppressed, which is bound to make even more people want to read it. S&S must be grateful indeed.

■ MACMILLAN's New Writing initiative seems on the surface to be a good deal for fledgling authors – no advance, but at 20 percent a royalty rate well above the norm, and an alternative to the odious world of vanity publishing. However, the downside soon becomes apparent.

The manuscripts will be "lightly edited", but surely these are the sort of manuscripts that will need a full, rigorous edit? After that, will anybody actually buy the books? Does anyone buy £15 hardbacks by unknowns? And will the booksellers touch them with a bargepole? Added to this, the proposed no-frills uniform cover design is likely to hinder the sales prospects of the titles. Allen Lane's original Penguins had uniform covers, but that was in the 1930s and they were sixpence a go.

The upshot of all this is a load of unknowns get their hopes falsely raised while Macmillan gets to take a punt for almost no stake. It resembles vanity publishing without the outlay on the part of the author. Surely it would make more sense to forego one blockbuster and use the money to give modest advances to several fledgling authors, edit them properly, and promote them as vigorously as possible? The sensible option rarely generates publicity, though.

■ AUTHOR and journalist Richard Webster was due to speak next month about his new book which challenges the conclusions of a government inquiry that there was widespread child abuse in north Wales care homes.

The venue for his talk could not have been more appropriate for the book, *The Secret of Bryn Estyn, the Making of a Modern Witchhunt*. It was to take place at Wrexham council's Erlas Centre, once the site of that very Bryn Estyn care home.

The conference Webster was to address had been organised by the North Wales branch of FACT, Falsely Accused Carers and Teachers, as a growing number of people, including Webster, believe that the case and other similar massive police investigations into abuse in homes in the 70s and 80s have resulted in serious miscarriages of justice (*Eyes passim*).

Last week Wrexham council, which had initially accepted the booking, suddenly changed its mind and decided it could not accept the booking. Could the about-turn have anything to do with the fact that Wrexham council is the successor to Clwyd county council, which is heavily criticised in the book? (Er... as is *Private Eye*. Ed.)

Not according to the council. It says the reason for refusing Webster is because his book may upset the former Bryn Estyn residents who disagree with Webster's controversial version of events.

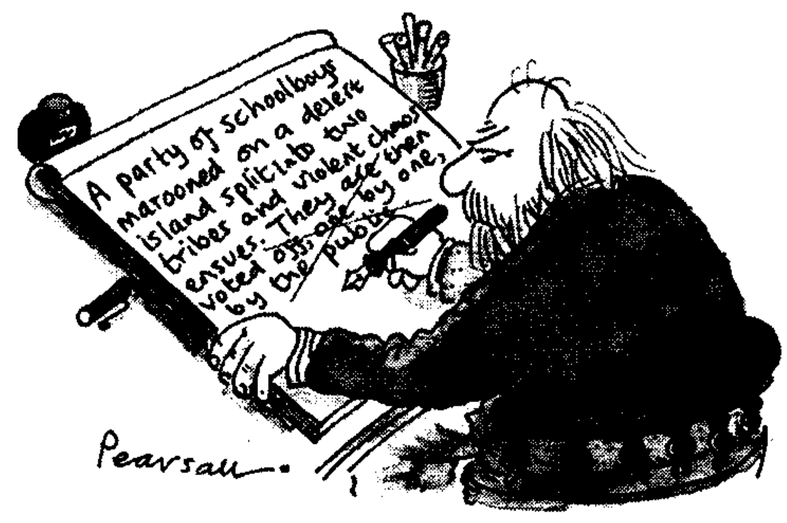
■ FABER has just reissued Michael Frayn's great comic novel *Towards the End of the Morning*.

In a new introduction, Frayn notes that people usually refer to it as his Fleet Street novel since "no one, for some reason, can remember the title I gave it, though I rather like it still".

As if to prove the point, even his own publishers don't know what it's called. On the front cover and the spine Messrs Fabber & Fabber have absent-mindedly mislaid the second definite article, titling it *Towards the End of Morning*.

'Bookworm'

First Drafts


A party of schoolboys marooned on a desert island split into two tribes and violent chaos ensues. They are then voted off one by one, by the public.
Pearsall

William Golding

"What's your favourite biscuit, Nick?" He lobs it straight back at me. "A chocolate Hobnob – you?" I confess to the Jaffa Cake. He brightens and, English graduate even in his crumbs, he offers a swift deconstruction. "I think Jaffa Cakes are like the biscuit equivalent of a plum – very easy to eat. Whereas with an apple – I think Nabokov has a wonderful phrase about bracing the fortress of an apple – apples are quite hard to get started on but a plum is like a Jaffa Cake. You don't have to make any effort to eat it at all. Chocolate Hobnobs – you have to give a little bit of yourself."

I listen to the beautiful sentences but I can't stop thinking – when is he going to tell me who he really is? He reminds me of a flower, he opens and closes with the light.

TANYA GOLD interviews NICK LAIRD, husband of Zadie Smith, *Guardian*

Ketan J. Patel, 42, is the Founder and Head of the Strategic Group at Goldman Sachs. His life involves a strict regime of travelling the world to present compelling thought to influence the agendas of leaders in industry, investing and government. This regime is interspersed with personal development time spent exploring disruptive technology, geo-political scenarios and possibilities, ancient military and esoteric thought, Tai Chi and Wing Chun, yoga, writing poetry, painting and drawing.

Author biography found on the jacket of The Master Strategist: Power, Purpose and Principle

Pseuds Corner

They got the name of the goalscorer wrong. Liverpool's shocking, and shockingly inevitably, fourth-minute goal was not scored by Luis Garcia, as the announcer claimed. It was scored by Havoc. It was created by Havoc and finished by Havoc, for last night Liverpool cried Havoc and let slip the dogs of sport.

SIMON BARNES
The Times

As one of this generation's most popular actors, [Brad] Pitt has explored many of the cultural tensions of our emerging postmodern era. Depicting masculine American whiteness in various stages of crisis, his characters generally enact complex postmodern agencies: they are never wholly coherent, they are often self-destructive, and they generally rely on a certain amount of play – between stability and instability, between life and death, between autonomy and alter-dependency, between control and abandon. Simultaneously reifying and challenging hegemonic codes of race, class, gender and regional or national identity, his characters explore the complex and changing postmodern cultural landscape [continues for some while]

Call for papers for a conference entitled 'The Cultural Logic of Brad Pitt', Montana State University

I think its because everything is under your control. Not just your finger-tip control. It's a very sensual thing. When you have a turbot, you can't help but think along the lines of making a woman feel happy in ways she wouldn't believe.

GORDON RAMSAY, asked 'why do chefs keep talking about sex?',
Scotland on Sunday

Pseudoku Corner

"...hand-created and individually authored by its Japanese inventors."

The Guardian

CONTRIBUTORS: Stephen Whittle, Mhairi Mcfarlane, Tamar Wilner, Paul Burditt, Allan Sutherland, Adam Macqueen.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

GMC

CARRY ON DOCTOR

THE general medical council (GMC) appears to have ignored the Shipman inquiry's condemnation and warning that its culture of self-interest comes at the expense of protecting patients.

This month, for example, it comprehensively whitewashed Dr Camille de San Lazaro (pictured), the paediatrician heavily criticised three years ago for her role in the case of Newcastle nursery workers Dawn Reed and Christopher Lillie, both of whom were falsely accused of child abuse.

Although the pair were cleared in court, they were forced into hiding by continuing allegations in newspapers and in a report by Newcastle city council. They finally won a huge high court libel victory against the city council in 2002, during which Mr Justice Eady concluded: "Where physical findings were negative or equivocal, Dr San Lazaro was prepared to make up the deficiencies by throwing objectivity and scientific rigour to the winds in a highly emotional misrepresentation of the facts." She was playing detective and psychologist, but ignoring her role as paediatrician, he said.

The judge described how in a long letter she wrote to the criminal injuries compensation board to help the children's parents' claim, "she set out a whole series of speculative thoughts, but she failed to mention at all the one matter directly within her expertise – namely the negative physical findings". The judge said: "Mercifully, I can assume that Dr San Lazaro is very much the exception among senior paediatricians."

Dr San Lazaro was appearing before the GMC accused of serious professional misconduct in relation to eight of the children. In one sense the panel had an easy job as the doctor had already admitted that she had "exaggerated and overstated" her findings and some of her work had been "inappropriate". She further admitted that there were deficiencies and inaccuracies in child protection medical records and that her medical reports and police witness statements differed from medical records.

The GMC panel found that her actions were inappropriate in relation to seven of the children; irresponsible in relation to six; and unprofessional in relation to five. But it concluded that although her actions fell short of that expected of a registered medical practitioner, it did not amount to serious professional misconduct. She could carry on without sanction.

The reason the panel gave was that she was overworked and under pressure, struggling to cope with an excessive workload – a plea of mitigation accepted by the GMC without reservation from none other than Dr Christopher Hobbs – one of the paediatricians behind the medical misdiagnoses that contributed to the notorious Cleveland abuse scandal.

Mr Justice Eady, however, had seen things very differently. "Dr San Lazaro's professional judgment and objectivity were in some of these cases hopelessly compromised," he said. "In particular, I can hardly sweep under the carpet the untrue accounts she was giving to the criminal injuries compensation board with a view to assisting some of the parents recover compensation out of public funds. She herself recognises that there were 'inaccuracies'. She could hardly do otherwise. I am afraid, however, that the problem is more fundamental and goes to professional integrity rather than competence."

The judge said the doctor's habit of "adding a sinister slant to what had been recorded originally as a neutral or non-specific finding" was deeply disturbing.

The consequences were devastating too for Reed and Lillie, as well as for the children and their families. But the consequences did not feature in the GMC panel's four-page conclusion. But as Dame Janet Smith, who headed the Shipman inquiry, found: "The culture with the GMC has been such that it focused too much on being fair to doctors and not sufficiently on the need to protect patients."

PS: Dr San Lazaro also played a key role in the wrongful conviction of Kevin Brown for raping a young boy. When the child was medically examined, he was not distressed or in pain and made no claims of abuse. But Brown was convicted after Dr San Lazaro told the court that a slight injury to the child's anus was likely to have been the result of assault. The appeal court heard from other experts that this was highly *unlikely*.

PFI NEWS

Cleaning up in Lothian

HAVING tied themselves in for anything up to 30 years, public sector bodies with problematic private finance initiative contracts are unsurprisingly reluctant to admit how badly they are going.

Hence a major legal dispute between NHS Lothian Trust and Consort Healthcare, the company that owns and runs the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary (ERI), has been relegated in the trust's words to a "technical issue" which "does not affect the ongoing provision of services".

In fact the disagreement concerns how much Consort, a joint venture between Balfour Beatty and Royal Bank of Scotland, should be paid for the services such as cleaning, portering and security it provides under a 25-year PFI deal.

The company wants an extra £1m a year, citing a "benchmarking" clause in the contract it says allows it to assess its charges against the going rate for such services, which has gone up in the two years since the hospital opened. The trust claims that the clause only provides for an increase if more services are provided and has lodged its case at the court of session while negotiations continue.

This "technical issue" is particularly awkward for Lothian. Its universities hospitals division, which runs the ERI, was £9m in the red last year largely as a result of the cost of the PFI scheme and has already been bailed out by the taxpayer and forced into stringent "efficiency savings". Equally worrying, if it loses this dispute, is the prospect of future benchmarking exercises imposing yet more expenses.

Whatever the outcome of the wrangle, the question remains: why would the NHS negotiate a deal so generous that it potentially allows for a vast increase in costs without any extra services? Wasn't the whole idea of PFI that such risks passed to the private sector?

One man who might know the answers is Sir Malcolm Bates, who wrote two reports advocating a massive taxpayer-funded boost for PFI in the early days of "new" Labour shortly before the ERI deal was signed. Not long afterwards he became a director of the industrial giant BICC that owns Balfour Beatty, the lucky winner of the ERI contract.

While Sir Malcolm's old firm stands to profit, NHS Lothian refuses to answer the *Eye's* questions about the benchmarking exercise. Among the embarrassing facts it doesn't want discussed is that the man responsible for the contract as Lothian's chief executive at the time, Trevor Jones, went on to run the whole of the NHS in Scotland and is now in charge of the health service in Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

Eye toll-ed you so

BIRMINGHAM chamber of commerce and industry has finally worked out how PFI really works and has declared that it is furious that MEL, the Australian and Italian consortium behind the M6 toll motorway, will raise its charges on 14 June.

Policy director Jerry Blackett ranted: "With carte blanche to do whatever it likes on prices for decades to come, there is no regulation whatsoever on how this scarce asset is maximised to the best advantage of the region and the country."

Blackett was particularly exercised by next month's 17 percent toll rise for heavy goods vehicles (HGVs). He said: "We believe the figures for HGV usage on the toll road are small and this increase will serve only to deter even more hauliers from using it. And the result of that will be to put more congestion back on the M6."

If he can find a copy of *Eye* 1096, he'll find the following explanation from December 2003: "Deterring truckers from the new road with a hefty toll will save the companies [which own MEL] money on maintenance (one lorry can cause as much wear and tear as 100,000 cars) and so maximise profits from cars. Meanwhile the ageing M6 will take the strain of heavy lorry traffic."

HEDGE FUNDS

Defying gravity

WITH stock markets no longer booming, rich and ambitious investors, not content with earning interest on their spare cash, are increasingly putting money into hedge funds that specialise in a range of financial gambles.

Traditionally these funds have been the preserve of wealthy speculators who can afford to lose a fortune; but rule changes brought in by the financial services authority (FSA) last year allow unit trusts on sale to Joe Public to enter into the kind of risky transactions, such as complex derivative trades, that are currently rumoured to be threatening a major collapse in the hedge fund industry.

Taking advantage of the new rules, a handful of firms are now selling on the mass market investments in what are enticingly called "absolute return" funds. The promoters reckon that, by using the hedge funds' risky methods, these investments can earn punters money even when the markets fall. Naturally their magical qualities command much higher fees – which aren't repaid if they lose money – for the companies that set up the funds, the first of which include Swiss banks UBS and Credit Suisse First Boston.

The FSA's adventurous approach (with other people's money) no doubt has the approval of two men appointed to positions of great influence in the world of financial regulation in the couple of years before the new rules came in: managing director at the treasury with overall responsibility for the FSA, James Sassoon, and FSA director of markets, Hector Sants. They are both career bankers recruited respectively from... UBS and Credit Suisse.

ASYLUM

Darfur evader

FOR MORE than two years the UK, like the rest of the world, has turned its back while Darfur in Western Sudan descended into mass killing, rape, torture and ethnic cleansing.

An estimated 300,000 are dead, two million people have been driven from their homes and 10,000 a month are still dying as the Khartoum-backed janjaweed Arab militias continue their terror. Now the UK is turning its back on those who managed to flee the brutality and seek refuge in England.

Yousuf Artayero was just 15 years old when he was found bewildered at the port of Harwich. He told an appalling story of how he had fled his family's farm near the village of Kaiba Fuka after an attack by the janjaweed in October 2003. His father and brother had been killed and his injured mother implored him to flee with all the money the family had. He says he hitched a lift to Port Sudan with a man who arranged with others to smuggle him on to a cargo boat.

Two months later the home office turned down his application for asylum saying his story was not credible. The official who considered his claim did not believe he would leave his injured mother or that a family of his relative "wealth" would not have moved earlier. The official also decided – quite wrongly – that because of a ceasefire between rebels in the area and the Sudanese government, Yousef would be safe. In fact, conveniently for the Sudanese authorities, the janjaweed are party to no ceasefires. And since October 2003 when Yousef escaped, another one million people have been displaced.

According to Amnesty International and Yousef's lawyers and supporters, this type of perverse decision-making is increasingly common as immigration and asylum officials come under political pressure to keep numbers down.

Yousef won an appeal before the immigration adjudicator; but the home office then challenged his right to remain and the case went before an immigration judge last month. Yousef's lawyers produced a wealth of evidence to support his claim. He spoke Fur, the language of the Kenjara clan, to which he says he belongs and which has been targeted by Arab militias. Dr Jan Coebergh, of Newcastle's Freeman Hospital and the University of Newcastle, has spent time in Darfur and gave expert evidence for Yousef, saying that he had described accurately the local geography, his school town, and the dominant tribes. He drew maps and identified photos. "I am of the firm opinion that he resided in the area he says he did," said Dr Coebergh.

But that was not enough for the immigration adjudicator. He deemed all the details Yousef had given as "an absence of any glaring errors or inconsistencies rather than any positive evidence". He also questioned how Yousef could have got to Port Sudan so far in the north of the country, when it is in fact 2,500km to the east. In addition, Dr Coebergh said the adjudicator's case against Yousef's was based on a death and displacement toll in Darfur of mid-2003.

"If an asylum seeker's story had as many inconsistencies as this judgment, his appeal would be refused," he said. Yousef's tragic story, by contrast, has no inconsistencies and his lawyers are preparing another appeal.

INTEGRATED TRANSPORT

Ferry silly

A FERRY route that has taken pedestrians between Hayling Island and Portsmouth for centuries may be closed after the ferry operating licence fee increased by nearly 15 times.

The Langstone Harbour Board, a body made up mainly of representatives from Portsmouth, Havant and Hampshire councils, wants to hike the annual licence fee for the ferry route from £920 to £13,260 in order to meet the cost of repairing and eventually replacing pontoons. The private ferry company, which carries pedestrians and cyclists across the harbour mouth, says it simply cannot afford the rise.

In order to know what the company could afford, the board has demanded to see the ferry company's accounts and passenger figures; but so far the company has been unwilling to hand them over. The board meets again next month.

Hampshire county council provides an annual subsidy of around £18,000 for the Hayling Ferry.

None of the councils involved is keen to put up an extra £12,000 – even though the ferry avoids a journey of more than 10 miles around the harbour via busy A-roads. Given that the county still proudly wears the logo for its 2001 award for best "integrated transport planning", *someone* had better put up the cash.

TOBACCO TRADING

BAT and balls

PAPERS released under an American legal ruling reveal the tactics used by British American Tobacco (BAT) to "challenge and ridicule" World Health Organisation (WHO) smoking reduction plans around the world.

BRITISH AMERICAN TOBACCO

Researchers from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine have been ploughing through 10 years worth of document archives released by BAT and several other companies under a legal settlement with the state of Minnesota. Their findings have been collected by anti-smoking group ASH, Christian Aid and Friends of the Earth, who have previously worked together on reports about BAT's claims to corporate social responsibility.

A fax to the BAT board describes the International Tobacco Growers' Association – which supposedly has greater credibility in lobbying the UN and its agencies, since it represents poor farmers rather than rich businessmen – as "a 'front' for our third world lobby activities at WHO".

A 1999 email proposes that the ITGA should "target WHO's blind spots on key health priorities, such as HIV/AIDS prevention and malaria". The documents reveal deliberate plans to constantly point out that these things should be priorities and to suggest that WHO is too focused on the concerns of liberal metropolitan first-worlders rather than real problems in the developing world.

In fact, smoking-related illness already kills five million people a year, and by 2030 is expected to kill seven million a year in the world's poorest countries – more than hepatitis and HIV-related deaths combined.

A 1996 letter reveals BAT and the Tobacco Institute of India discussing how to spoil "World No Tobacco Day" (run by WHO, UNESCO and the International Olympic Committee). Plans included initiating media stories on the state of primary health in India which focused on the fact that "first world" health problems "like smoking" were dwarfed by "more immediate" problems. "Last year we were able to initiate good coverage of criticism of the WHO," brags the letter.

PS: In 2000 BAT spent £3.8m funding an International Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility at the University of Nottingham. So far, none of the centre's published research has tackled the tobacco industy.

CRIMINAL CASE REVIEWS

Don't bet on justice

RAYMOND GILBERT has served 24 years in prison for a murder he says he never committed. The only "evidence" against him was his own confession to the multiple stabbing of Toxteth betting shop manager John Sutton back in 1981 – extracted after two days of interrogation and intimidation by police, without access to a lawyer or to anyone else.

Gilbert was then aged 22, poorly educated, suffered a speech impediment which became worse under pressure, and had a profound fear of being assaulted due to his family history. No witness picked him out on an ID parade; there was no forensic evidence to link him to the crime scene (despite the brutality of the attack); and no murder weapon was ever found.

His initial alibi – that he was with his girlfriend – was only withdrawn after she herself was detained for a week and threatened with criminal charges. His accounts of the "crime" were also full of glaring inconsistencies. In short, it was the kind of confession obtained under duress that the court of appeal has long since discredited; and such a prosecution would never be brought today.

But Gilbert, now 45, has not only completed the 15-year tariff imposed by the trial judge for murder, but has served nine additional years, partly because he is classed as being "in denial" and partly because he has been regarded as disruptive. He is currently in Grendon prison, waiting while lawyers prepare another application to the criminal cases review commission in a bid to get his conviction quashed. His co-accused, John Kamara, had his conviction quashed by the court of appeal in 2000.

The two men were said to have planned a robbery at a Toxteth betting shop in March 1981, which went wrong. Gilbert was said to have produced a bread knife and stabbed the manager to death. A petty crook, he was arrested three days later.

At the time of the trial, consultant psychologist Olive Tunstall said she thought Gilbert's confession was unreliable based on his "vulnerability" at the time". Along with its inconsistencies, there had also been a fierce altercation in the shop the day before the murder in which a man – not Kamara or Gilbert – had threatened to return to "sort out" the manager. None of this was properly explored in court because Gilbert suddenly changed his plea to guilty. It was, he said later, a misguided attempt to secure an acquittal for Kamara, after the latter's friends threatened Gilbert for wrongly implicating Kamara.

As *Eye* readers will know, Kamara spent 19 years in jail before he was freed by the appeal court. The judges were furious that hundreds of documents – dozens helpful to the defence case – had been concealed. One (unused) prosecution witness, for example, said he saw a van draw up outside the betting office and four men armed with something like a pickaxe handle get out and force their way into the betting shop.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

THE bursting of the Regal Petroleum bubble – shares down more than 60 percent last week after the City woke up to the fact that there was no Greek oil find, something smarter players spotted weeks ago – has left many red faces and a lot of offshore smiles from those already out or short.

Regal's founder Frank Timis has always been a taste that few acquired long term. The Romanian-born Australian floated Regal in 2002 with the unique admission for a company chairman that he had two criminal convictions for drugs offences. Timis and his backers spun that as deserving Brownie points for honesty on the basis that that was then and this was now.

But descriptions of these convictions, like much of what Timis claimed about his colourful past, from his background in Ceausescu-ruled Romania to his journey from the Balkans to Australia, was often contradictory if not disputed by others as fictional. However, the City fans of Frank were quite prepared to ignore such cautionary signals and believe his non-stop hype about the oil finds and gold prospects for Regal and his Canadian and Australian companies – European Goldfields (like Regal also AIM listed), Gabriel Resources and International Goldfields – in Greece and his homeland.

"We're just going round and round in circles!"

Floated at 60p, Regal rocketed over 500p earlier this year on hopes about its Kallirachi-2 well in the Aegean Sea. The shares are now around 85p with the smell of badly burned fingers from those City funds that took part in a placing at 390p only in April.

Shareholders have forced Timis to step down as Regal chief executive but he remains as chairman. But as at Gabriel and European it may not be long before the company decides Timis is better off the board, even if he remains a big shareholder. Those who have investigated Timis in Australia and Romania allege he has form for exaggeration if not disinformation or worse. They also point to his fondness for controversial business associates, especially in Romania.

The questions about Timis begin early on. Was he, as he claims, an uneducated, penniless victim of Ceausescu who had to escape on foot from Romania or a trained car mechanic who arrived in Perth like many other Eastern European immigrants?

What is shown by records in Western Australia is that between 1980 and 1993 he was a truck driver, ran a pizza takeaway, became a failed gold miner and ran some unsuccessful companies, one of which collapsed big time. He was also made bankrupt as well as gaining three, not two, drug convictions. The Timis version was that he had been a deep-sea pearl diver and a manager of ships and trucks.

A Vasile Timis, his given name, aka truck driver "Bill" Timis was made bankrupt for A$16,000 (£6,700) in 1986. In 1982 at 18 he was convicted and fined A$1,000 for possession of marijuana. Eight years later he was convicted and fined A$10,000 (£4,200) for selling and supplying heroin. Timis had offered the heroin to an undercover cop. At his trial Timis claimed he did not intend to sell the drugs but rob the police officer. In 1994 after a police raid on his home he pleaded guilty and was fined A$17,000 (£7,100) for possession of heroin with intent to sell or supply. At this trial Timis claimed he had previously been a heroin addict. In later years Timis claimed never to have used heroin. He explained his criminal past by falling in with the wrong crowd.

By 1993 Timis was out of pizza and into gold prospecting. That venture flopped and three other companies Timis formed were struck off by 2002. Timis also claimed to have been chairman of something called Pneumatic International which had a market value of A$150m (£62m). It is suspected that this was in reality Pneumatic Systems International where he was a director from 1995 to 2001. The company was loss making and the shares worth a very long way from A$150m.

In 1995 Timis formed an Australian company, Gabriel Resources, which some allege obtained later that year the first concession to exploit the gold deposits at Rosia Montana, once worked by the Romans and claimed to be among the biggest in Europe. Australian promoter Tony Sage became a director. Sage was later an original Regal shareholder. He now runs International Goldfields.

But Gabriel ran into financial difficulties under pressure from National Australia Bank, owed A$300,000 (£125,000), which along with other creditors forced the company into administration in September 1996 with debts of A$2.1m (£875,000). Creditors received 12 cents on the dollar.

However, before this happened it is alleged that the Rosia Montana concession was sold or transferred for A$1 (42p) to a new Gabriel Resources which had been formed in Jersey in 1996. The Timis camp insist that it was the Jersey company that was awarded the Romanian gold mining concession.

By a strange and unusual but no doubt genuine coincidence, the liquidation of the Australian Gabriel was overseen by two accountants, Glenn Featherby and Mark Reilly, who later became shareholders and/or directors with Timis in the Canadian Gabriel Resources, European Goldfields and Regal Petroleum.

The Canadian Gabriel emerged as a listed company in 1997. It had acquired the Jersey Gabriel by way of yet another Gabriel Resources, this time registered in Barbados. Despite investing more than Can$120m (£52m) in Romania, no gold has yet been mined. The reasons range from the failure to raise the more than Can$400m to begin open-pit mining to opposition from environmentalists and those local residents who will lose their homes. The European Commission has also expressed doubts on environmental grounds. Gabriel shares are now Can$1.40 compared with a high last year of more than Can$5.

Timis was effectively forced out of Gabriel in 2003 with the compensation of a Can$2m (£860,000) pay-off and a consultancy arrangement. The company commissioned an independent investigation into his previous conduct and allegations of improper and illegal actions made by the former chief operating officer. The investigations found Timis had had no material adverse impact and rejected the other allegations as unfounded.

European Goldfields has also been a poor performer, despite its similar supposed golden prospects in Romania. EG was spun out of Gabriel Resources in 2000 containing concessions close to Rosia Montana. Its shares have more than halved on AIM to 75p.

Timis resigned from EG in May 2003 around the time he also left Gabriel to devote more time to his other interests. He remained a big shareholder and became even bigger – almost 18 percent – last November when EG expanded its interests in Greek gold mining concessions. Timis, via offshore companies in Barbados and Luxembourg, sold EG the right to increase its stake in Hellas Gold for $77m (£42m) – two thirds in shares (then 132p) at 175p and around $25m (£14m) in cash. The option would have cost Timis around $18m (£10m). Instead he switched the obligation to pay to EG and pocketed $25m. That looks a better deal than the shares which cannot be sold until next November at the earliest.

The Australian listed International Goldfields is a third participant in the gold dreams surrounding the Transylvania region of Romania, home to that other more famous Romanian, Count Dracula. Floated at 20 cents in 2002, the shares are now back to 25 cents after topping 40 cents last year. Timis controls close to 10 percent of the company run by his old mate Tony Sage.

Just how Timis and his companies have been able to garner all these gold and, with Regal, gas concessions in Romania has created much controversy and speculation in his former homeland. Suggestions are made of the influential role of former key figures in Ceausescu's notorious Securitate state security organisation, as well as political influence peddlers and officials close to the government in Bucharest.

One of Timis's closest allies has been Ovidiu Tender, a controversial business figure whose name has featured in two recent scandals. Tender became a director of the Canadian Gabriel Resources. Former Gabriel director Canadian Stephen Roman, involved in an earlier Romanian privatisation scandal, worked with Tender and

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Crapital Radio

Shares under Chief Executive David Mansfield...

+ 170%

...and in the 8 years since

...in the 7 years before he took over

–41%

accompanied Timis on his return to Romania.

Former senior NATO security official Jan-Willem Matser, jailed for 14 months in Holland last year on fraud and forgery charges, had business dealings with the not so Tender and his conglomerate. They met at a 2002 security conference in Romania sponsored by Tender and Timis. Tender and Timis worked together in a failed 2003 bid to buy the state-owned oil group Petrom. Tender denied any wrongdoing.

Following a change of government last November a criminal fraud investigation has been launched into the privatised Rafo Onesti oil refinery, linked to Tender, which owes the state more than £300m in unpaid taxes and other debts. It has been reported that the Romanian authorities have frozen certain Tender assets. He has denied any involvement in fraud.

The main shareholder in Rafo is a British company, Balkan Petroleum, half owned by the Romanian group VGB, suggested associates of Tender. For five months in 2004 Balkan shared its Mayfair registered office with Regal Petroleum. Perhaps not surprising as a 25 percent stake is held by a former Regal company in Jersey now named Central Europe Petroleum (UK). Timis says he sold the company after setting it up to facilitate the deal at the request of Tender. Former Regal executive and EG director David Grannell was an original director of Balkan.

The collapse in the Regal share price and Timis' reputation have prompted the regulators to examine trading in the shares before the bad news from Greece. The shares were falling ahead of the April placing and continued sharply down in the next three weeks. But of equal interest is what happened to the 40m shares issued to the original owners of Regal Petroleum ahead of the 2002 float. These mainly went to the interests of Timis (12.6m), Featherby (4.8m) and a Ukrainian Viktor Dmitriyev (5m) as well as offshore companies in Jersey linked to company administrators Rathbones (15m). By December 2002 three other offshore companies owned 24 percent of Regal. By December 2003 all but one, Ballure Trading, which had held 16.6%, had ceased to have a declarable holding, possibly because of dilution through new share issues. Timis (8.5m) and Featherby (2.1m) too appeared to have been sellers or transferors of Regal shares. But now it is clear that most if not all the offshore companies who obtained shares in 2002 were out well before the bubble burst. Timis has also suffered as a shareholder from the collapse in the share price of his companies.

This is all embarrassing to Timis's top drawer institutional backers like Commerzbank, Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch and Henderson Global Investors. They should have known better.

That the Timis plays began in Canada is no surprise. The home of the Vancouver Stock Exchange saw large numbers of British investors skinned alive by promoters of oil and mining fantasies in faraway places with strange sounding names during the 80s and 90s. A history surely well known to the Canadian broker Canaccord Capital which has been one of Timis's biggest fans along with London broker Evolution. History has a nasty habit of repeating itself for the unwary.

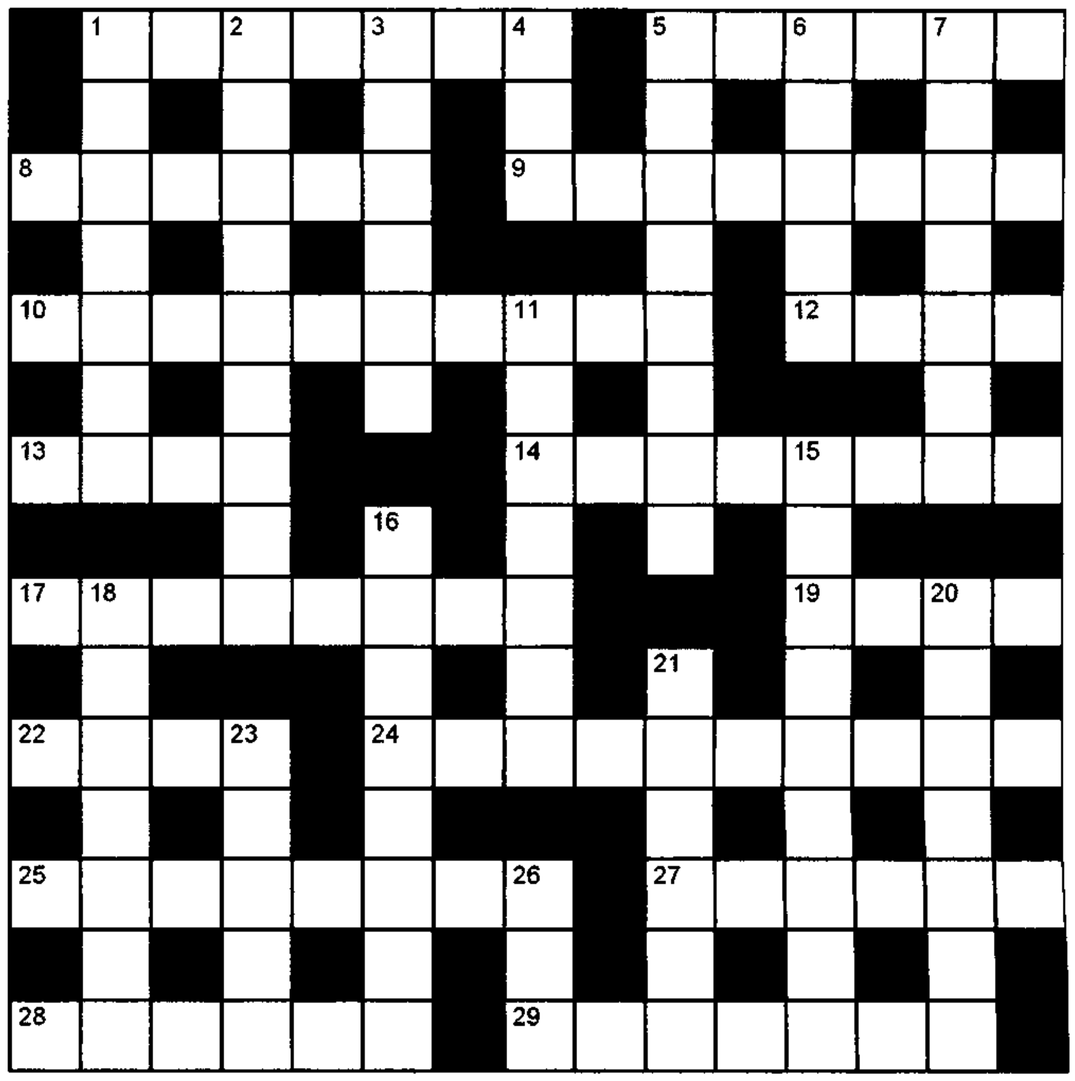
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 288

by Cyclops

£100 prize for first correct solution opened on 3 June 2005

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1/5dn. Labour's election legacy: brought down with remorse, leaderless (but holding onto has-been PM) (7,8)
5 What do you call a mistress getting screwed by 2dn, no trouble? (6)
8 Lawsuit from a group like the Real IRA? F-off! (6)
9 *Hello*! has Frost on Brenda (who brings about a possible high level seizure) (8)
10 Labour product of 1945-55 – Bobby Moore exchanged ring for one (4,6)
12 Pop brother? He certainly would! (4)
13 Aide's frigging conceit (4)
14 Nevertheless, half sounds like a hunter's arse (8)
17 Revere, at bottom, the *Eye* stalwart (4,4)
19 Not the size taken by the big-busted Lincoln totty (4)
22 Expulsion of the windy, useless type (4)
24 Greasy arm-twisting, dead inside, politician who was shunned by Bush (5,5)
25 Is powerless to restrain migrant Mali scrounger, according to 2dn? (8)
27 Suddenly understand an old-fashioned shag (6)
28 Dick King's off after second unappetising helping of heavy food (6)
29 Bron alone applied to penetrate Brenda (7)

DOWN

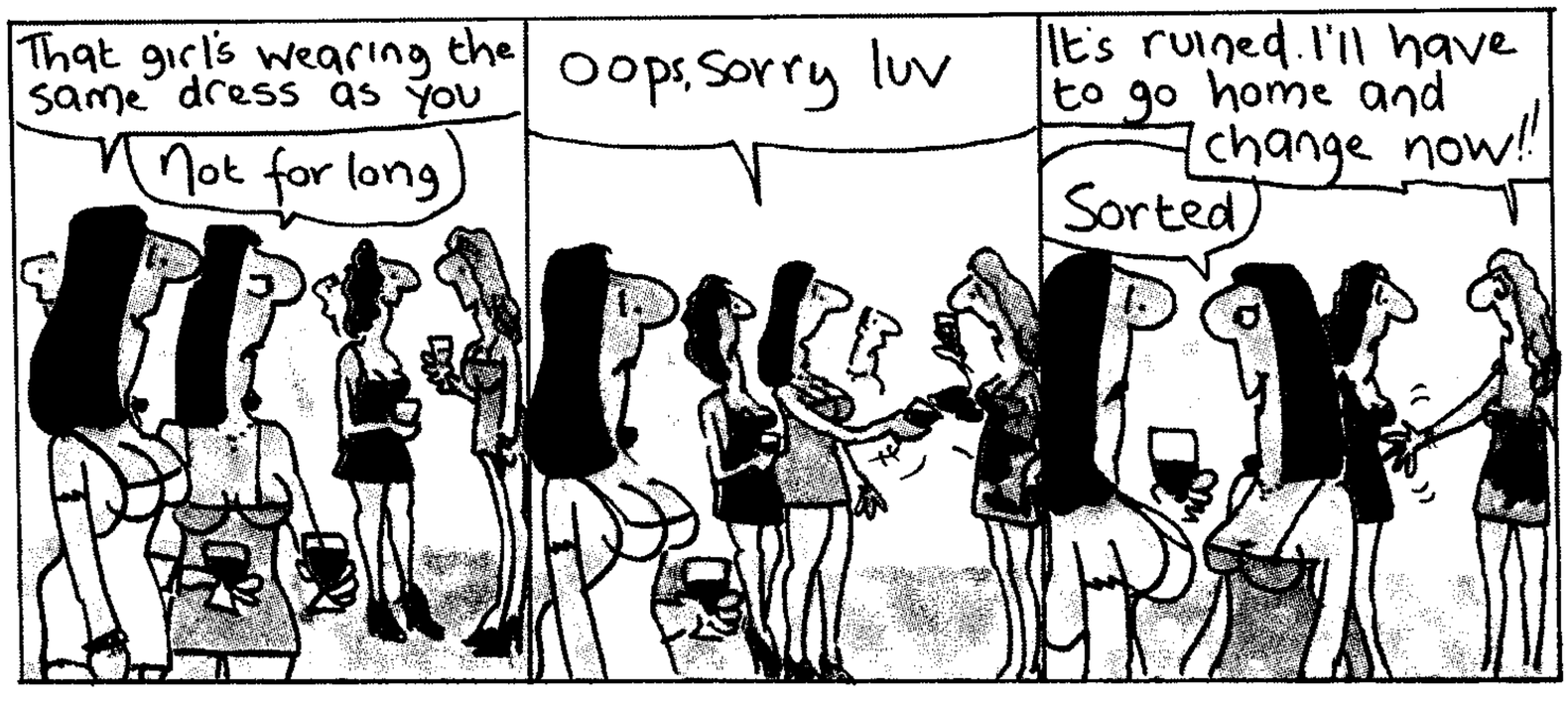
1/26/23 Play Cliff Blair's way? (7,3,5)
2 Right rag for the cleaner, outspoken chap? (5,4)
3 Johnny, firm, gets up former teen gang member without name (6)
4 "Party going to extreme left of Howard" – outburst of an exasperated Simpson (3)
5 See 1 Across
6 Just look at the state of the boozer! (5)
7 Bush gets to do it and it means a slow death (Cheney holds the old president up) (3,4)
11 Lulu met Boris knocking one out – criminal (7)
15 Drunken bum moans when gobbling daughter of "the people's champion" (9)
16 Food that makes you go violent, given time (8)
18 One piss-awful fate for a disreputable type (1,3,3)
20 Crappy Brit group swapping U2's leader for ELO's – hardly a dynamic speaker (7)
21 Non-PC foreigner with lordly organ, taking bow (6)
23 See 1dn.
26 See 1dn.

Crossword 287 winner: CHRISTOPHER ELLIS

ACROSS: 7 Brummie 10 Oppos 11 Skinny-dip 14 Shrank 16/8/12/18 Get a grip on yourself man 17 Rossini 19 Roving 21 Crusades 23 In the shit 25 Throb 26 Kerouac 27 Reactor.

DOWN: 1 Jump suit 2 Amis 3 Newsflash 4 Maxi 5 French kiss 6 Unspoken 7/25 Booby trap 9 Padua 13 String em up 15 Vibrators 16 Garlicky 18 Moderate 20 Voter 22 Sober 24 Hack.

HUSBAND



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10.00pm	*Live Auction conducted by a Mark Hewitt*
10.30pm	*Dancing to the fantastic sounds of 'No Idea'*
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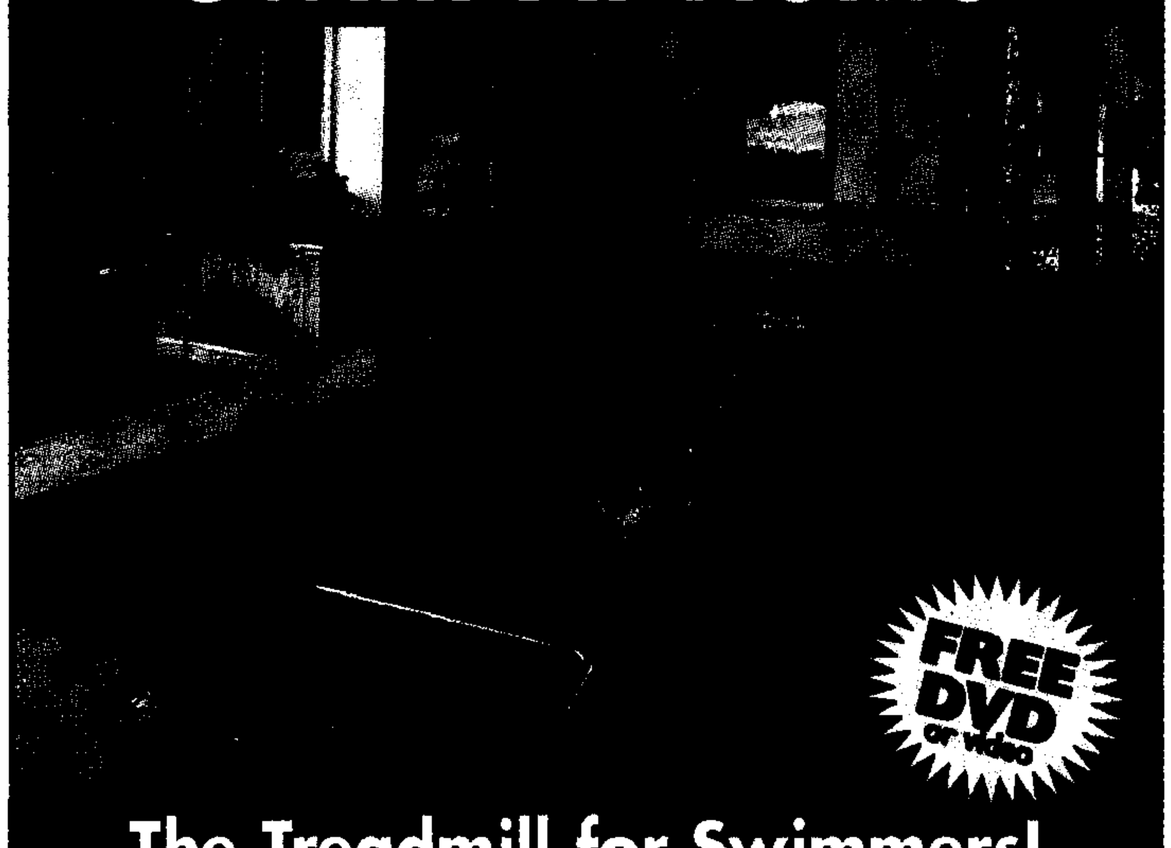

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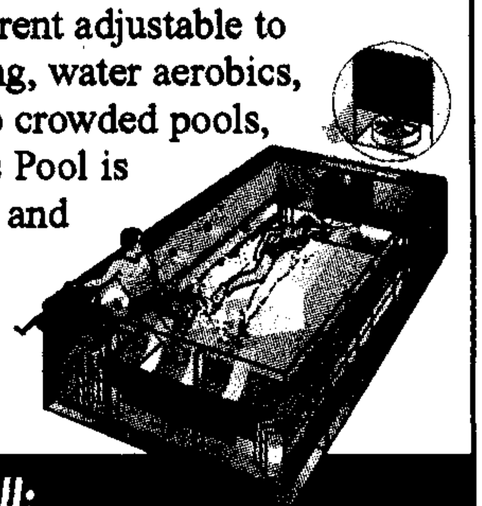

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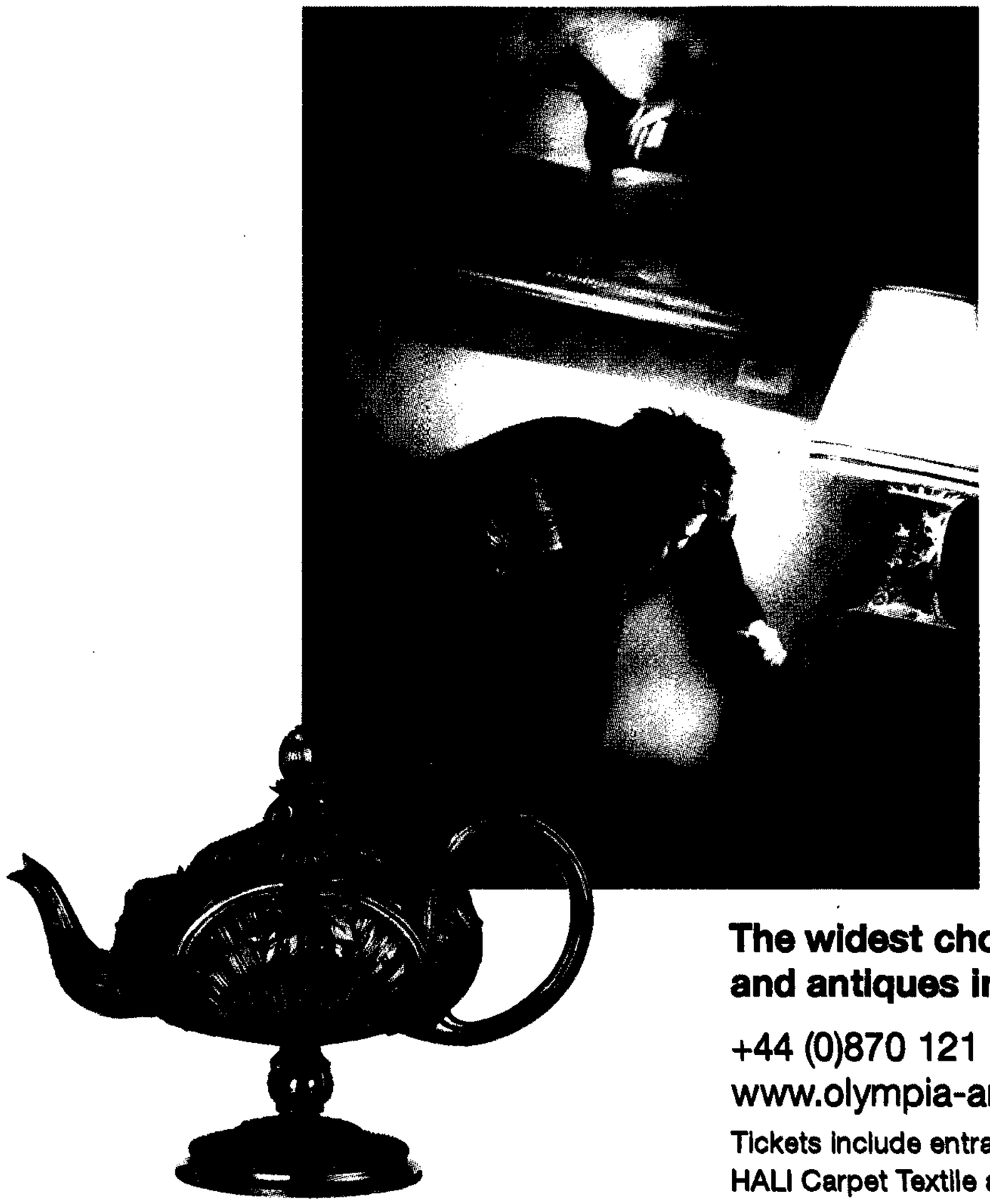

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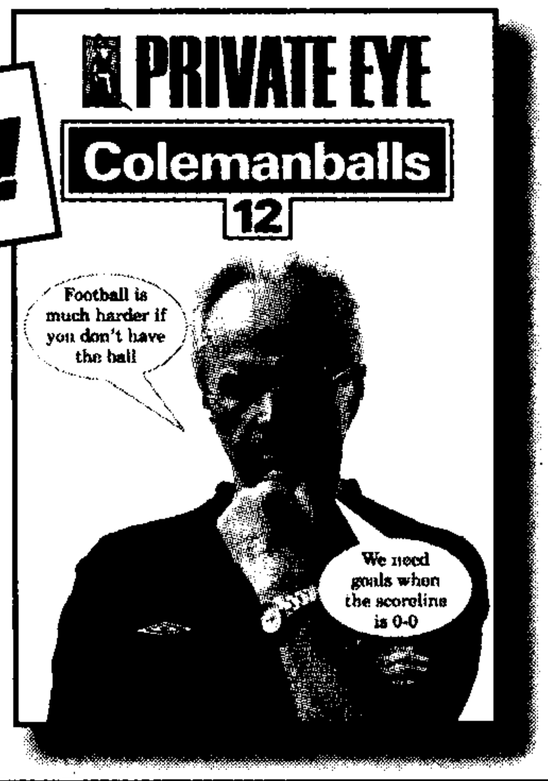

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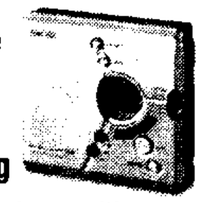

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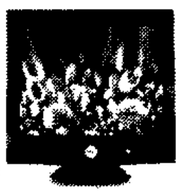

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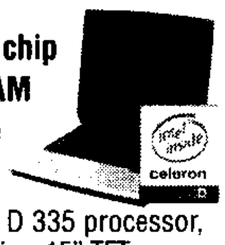

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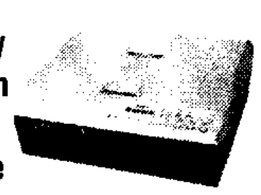

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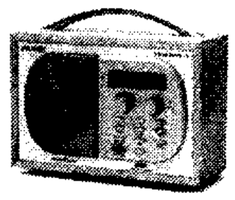

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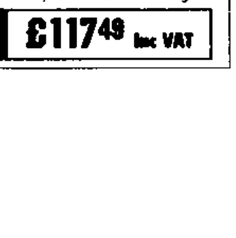

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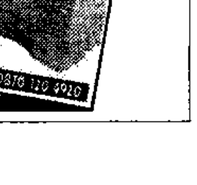

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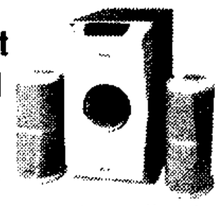

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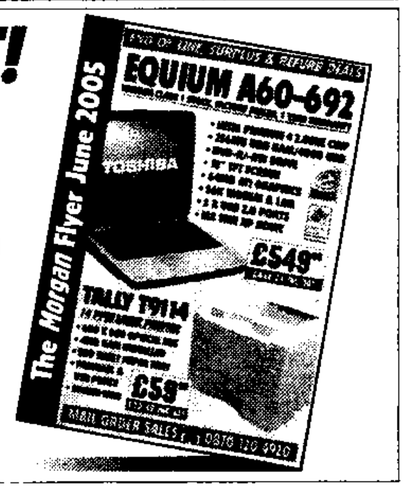

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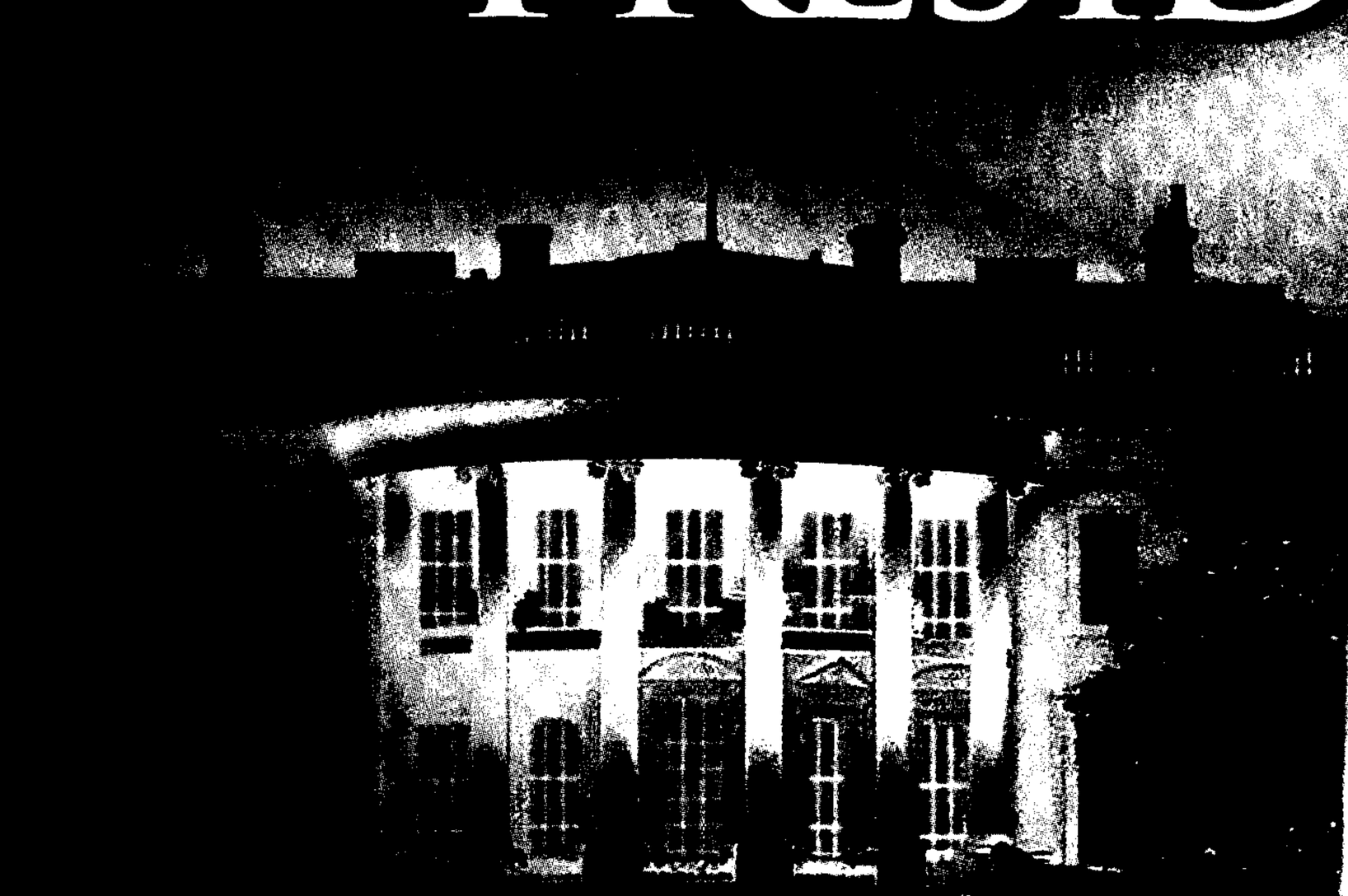

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